



NEW APPROACHES TO
BYZANTINE HISTORY AND CULTURE

Pseudo-Dionysius and Christian Visual Culture, c.500–900

Edited by

FRANCESCA DELL'ACQUA
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INTRODUCTION

The name Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite is recurrent in discussions of late antique and medieval art and aesthetics of the eastern and western Mediterranean. Believed for a long time to be a disciple of Saint Paul, but in truth engineered to appear as such in the early sixth century, the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* developed a number of themes which have a predominant visual-spatial dimension and thus expressed a strong tendency towards ‘visual thinking’ or thinking through images. Included in these themes are topics such as the metaphysics of light, angelic hierarchies, symbolic theology, liturgical rites and their performing space; but there are also visual and artistic metaphors such as ‘luminous darkness’, ‘divine painter’, ‘divine statues’, as well as geometrical metaphors for the movements of angels, souls, and so on.

Commentators from different cultural backgrounds and of various Christian traditions, such as the Byzantines and the Latins, the Syrians and the Georgians, the Armenians, and the Arabs, concerned themselves for more than a millennium with the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, adopting its vocabulary and applying it to their respective needs. Its language and concepts were immensely influential over the centuries, not only in the realm of theology and ecclesiastical matters. Scholars posited that visual artists and architects ‘translated’ images suggested by the *Corpus Dionysiacum* into figural and spatial representations. As a result, the bearing of Dionysian thought on Byzantine and western art has become a scholarly subject. However, while the reception of Pseudo-Dionysius is demonstrable in the case of textual commentaries by looking at specific

concepts and terminology, it is less so in other fields such as visual arts. An example of this, is the well-known and long-standing controversy surrounding Erwin Panofsky's thesis that Pseudo-Dionysius' metaphysics of light greatly influenced the birth of Gothic architecture.¹ What needs to be acknowledged is a growing interest in Byzantine Studies about the eventual Dionysian inspiration for mosaics, icons, and buildings.²

This volume does not intend to cover fully or systematically the wider question of Pseudo-Dionysius' impact on Christian visual culture. Rather, it invites readers to consider how profound the interaction of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* has been with many aspects of Byzantine and western cultures, including ecclesiastical and lay power, politics, religion, and the arts in the period of its development, and how long-lasting its impact has been on the visual thinking and figural art-making of Mediterranean Christianity.

The need to reconsider Pseudo-Dionysius' influence during this period arose during conversations between the current editors and other scholars. A workshop convened in April 2014 by Francesca Dell'Acqua at the SISMEI–Società Internazionale per lo Studio del Medioevo Latino in Florence under the aegis of its president, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, and its director, Francesco Santi, allowed a group of scholars from different disciplines to discuss the dissemination and reception of Pseudo-Dionysius' ideas in the East and West between the sixth and the ninth centuries. These scholars were Alexander Alexakis, Marianna Cerno, Réka Forrai, Diego Ianiro, Ernesto S. Mainoldi, Pietro Podolak, and Paravicini Bagliani. The idea for this book emerged in 2015, when some of its future contributors were participating in sessions on Pseudo-Dionysius and the Arts ('The Visual Rhetoric of Hierarchy', and 'Pseudo-Dionysius and the Images') organised by Francesca Dell'Acqua and Ernesto S. Mainoldi at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds. These sessions were generously sponsored by the ICMA–International Center for Medieval Art, The Cloisters, MET, NYC, directed then by Nancy Patterson Ševčenko. At Leeds, we were approached by Leonora Neville. Intrigued by our presentations, she suggested we should propose a book on Pseudo-Dionysius and the arts to Palgrave–Macmillan for the newly launched series, *New Approaches to Byzantine History and Culture*, edited by herself, Florin Curta, and Shaun Tougher. Now, a few years later, we have coordinated the efforts of scholars from different fields, having in common the desire to explore the significance of the Pseudo-Dionysius in the culture of Byzantium and

the western Mediterranean between the sixth and the ninth centuries. We need to thank Katherine Marsengill and Evgenios Iverites for generously helping in the language revision of those chapters authored by non-native English speakers.

The original question we posed to our contributors was as follows: Given the vast resonance they immediately gained and enjoyed for long, how did the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius reflect *and* shape the imagination and the perception of the world and of the heavenly orders during its own time and in later centuries? We emphasised that the importance the *Corpus* had for thinking about the divine in visual and spatial terms should not be overshadowed by Pseudo-Dionysius' tendency towards apophatism, that is, the belief that God cannot be known and therefore cannot be described, nor by his propensity for logical–philosophical reasoning. Indeed, Pseudo-Dionysius was also very visual in his evocation of the heavenly and world orders, of their members and their mutual interactions. Proof of this lies in the importance Pseudo-Dionysius gained in the discourse of the iconophiles, those supporting the production and cult of sacred images during the Byzantine Iconoclasm or controversy over sacred images (c.726–843).³ However, Pseudo-Dionysius did not advocate for the veneration of images, since he considered them simply functional aids to uplift the mind to the divine.⁴ Still, as Andrew Louth has noted, 'his [Dionysius'] works contain not just a metaphysic that relies at every point on the notion of the image, but also evidence (that would have then been taken for evidence of apostolic usage) for the use of images in Christian worship'.⁵ In other words, the image—be it mental, verbal, or figural—has a firm place in the Dionysian discourse. Yet the place of images in the reception of Pseudo-Dionysius' work needs to be clarified, especially between the sixth and the ninth centuries, when the significance of the visual in Christianity was questioned. This is a period in which, in the words of Averil Cameron, 'Classical Antiquity finally did become Byzantium', and when images began to 'form part of the intellectual framework round which we can see Byzantium reorientating itself' in search of new authorities.⁶ In this context, the carefully planned creation of the pseudo-apostolic authority of Dionysius early in the sixth century, when imperial rulership was particularly anxious to establish *auctoritas* in other aspects of the world order, seems to fit perfectly. At this point we should clarify that, according to the use commonly adopted in Dionysian studies, the contributors to this volume refer to the sixth-century author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* both as Dionysius

the Areopagite or Pseudo-Dionysius. References to the historical figure of Dionysius the Areopagite mentioned in the *Acts of the Apostles* as the Athenian disciple of St Paul, will be clearly disambiguated.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

The following chapters are all concerned with images in one way or another. They explore how ideas and mental images in the *Corpus Dionysiacum* reflected earlier philosophical approaches while also sowing the seeds for thinking about the heavenly and terrestrial realms through images. This book does not aim to promote the idea that Pseudo-Dionysian thought was literally expounded in figural imagery, but rather that his thought informed the mentality that produced specific figural imagery or its layout. However, we should first draw attention to the historiographical approach followed in this volume, which the authors, from different backgrounds and disciplines, came to adopt independently.

Pseudo-Dionysius is here regarded as a reliable follower of the Church Fathers and himself as Church Father fully encompassed in the historical development of late antique Christian thought. By contrast, the most common view of Dionysius assumes his dependence upon the last Neoplatonists and sees him as a crypto-pagan author committed to preserving the lessons of the School of Athens, which was threatened by the advance of Christianity. This view neglects other aspects that tie his writings to the Christian theological, liturgical, and ascetic traditions. Even in recent, there is a certain reticence to acknowledge the essential contribution offered by Pseudo-Dionysius to the developments of Patristic and early Byzantine thought. Challenged by the need to reposition this author in his historical and most suitable theoretical framework rather than maintaining his place as a Platonic-Christian chimera, the contributors to this volume highlight his originality in late antique Christian thought and in the development of visual thinking between roughly 500–900. The close acquaintance Pseudo-Dionysius had with Neoplatonic philosophical culture is not seen here as impinging on his identity as a genuine Christian thinker, nor on his rightful place in the Patristic and Byzantine tradition of thought. Chapters 1, 2, and 4 remark upon how ecclesiastical and liturgical concepts as described by Pseudo-Dionysius are essential to understanding the development of visual thinking in Christian mentality during these centuries. Chapters 3 and 4

see Pseudo-Dionysius as an essential link between pillars of Christian thought such as the Cappadocian Fathers in the fourth century and Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus between the seventh and the eighth centuries.⁷ Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the spiritual–ascetic perspective of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, which constitutes one of its major features, both explicitly and implicitly. Again, Chapter 4 with Chapter 7 argue that Pseudo-Dionysius was an author firmly rooted in the spiritual tradition of Byzantine homiletic, having been assimilated into Byzantine theology and spirituality. This explains why his writings also held a central position in the debate on images between the eighth and the ninth centuries, as noted in Chapters 3, 8, and 9. However, such an historiographical perspective on Pseudo-Dionysius as being firmly part of the Christian tradition does not prevent a close examination of his Greek philosophical sources, as can be found in Chapters 1 and 2.

On a general level, we should also note that one of the most relevant topics in the theoretical framework of this volume is ‘hierarchy’, a term which was coined by Pseudo-Dionysius himself. The Dionysian system of hierarchies—celestial and ecclesiastical—entails an implicit rhetoric of spatiality. This challenged our contributors to examine the deeper implications of hierarchy in explaining its importance for understanding Pseudo-Dionysius’ unique contribution to the visual imaginary of Byzantine and medieval art. The system of hierarchies, in its ecclesial dimension and its connection to the theme of deification (which is the ultimate goal of both celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies), is appropriately framed by Chapters 4 and 6. The image of the hierarchical order is also considered as a source of inspiration for figurative artworks in Chapters 5, 6, 8, and 9, as well as highlighted in Chapter 7, which analyses the ‘visual thinking’ suggested by Andrew of Crete in his homilies.

We should now describe the contents of the volume in an orderly fashion. In Chapter 1, Ernesto S. Mainoldi reconstructs the historical and doctrinal rationale behind Pseudo-Dionysius’ image and symbol theory, paving the ground to the following chapters. Mainoldi conceives of Pseudo-Dionysius as a link between early Patristic and Byzantine thought and believes he used the terminology and concepts of late Neoplatonism in order to criticise its theoretical model. Mainoldi also expounds upon concepts and terms relating to the sphere of visual thinking that occupy a central position within the theory of knowledge and the mystical–sacramental vision of Pseudo-Dionysius. Firstly, Mainoldi frames them within the ‘Dionysian system’. Then, he focuses on the original objectives of

Corpus Dionysiacum in order to shed light on Dionysius' interaction with the on-going theological and ecclesiological debate. He also takes a look at the sources and the historical context in which the *Corpus* was composed. Finally, the chapter emphasises how Pseudo-Dionysius contributed to the definition of a new paradigm of thought with regards to the status of the image. This definition played a decisive role in the formation and the development of Byzantine visual thinking. Pseudo-Dionysius essentially stimulated his audience to conceive theology through images—an approach that we address here as *eikonic* thought. By this expression, we intend to encompass something greater than mere visual thinking. In fact, the concept of *eikon* according to Pseudo-Dionysius and to the tradition to which he referred, is rooted in the ideas of the creation of man and the Incarnation of the Word of God.

In Chapter 2, Angelo Tavarolo deepens the analysis of aesthetic themes in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. In the *Celestial Hierarchy* and in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, Pseudo-Dionysius uses 'images' as theological instruments. In particular, he presents two kinds of images: biblical images which are dissimilar to their prototype, and liturgical symbols which are similar to the prototype. Tavarolo suggests that the Pseudo-Dionysian distinctions between images and symbols and similarity and dissimilarity are mainly inherited from Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Republic*. In fact, the terms and categories used by Proclus to distinguish poetic genres are also employed by Pseudo-Dionysius, but given other meanings, in order to describe the specific features of both liturgical symbols and biblical images. One of the elements through which Pseudo-Dionysius' reliance on Proclus can be demonstrated is the suggestive metaphor of the bishop as the 'divine painter' who operates through liturgy.

In Chapter 3, Filip Ivanović explores the places material things and senses have in Pseudo-Dionysius, starting from the latter's claim that divine attributes 'can be fashioned from material things to symbolise what is intelligible and intellectual'. God's own majesty is intermingled in sensible things, which thus serve as vehicles for the human mind to ascend to God. Such arguments constitute the core of Pseudo-Dionysius' ecclesiological doctrine, which relies on the notion that the ecclesiastical hierarchy is the image of the celestial one, and proceeds by interpreting different sensible aspects of sacraments which manifest appearances of beauty, such as odours or light. This chapter also describes Pseudo-Dionysius' aesthetic soteriology, or doctrine of salvation. Accordingly, Pseudo-Dionysius' soteriology centres around deification and union

with God and cannot be completed without the aid of sensible things. Ultimately, this chapter offers insights into Pseudo-Dionysius' influence on the doctrine of icons that was laid out during the iconoclastic controversy in the eighth and ninth centuries.

In Chapter 4, Evgenios Iverites investigates the ecclesiastical hierarchy as outlined in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, which subordinates monks to bishops and other clergy while assuming holiness as the norm for the latter. However, this position contrasted with contemporary widespread views. Pseudo-Dionysius' teaching on this matter is therefore examined in itself and through its reception by three early Byzantine readers of his *Corpus*—John of Scythopolis, Antiochus of Mar Saba, and Maximus the Confessor. Aware of tensions between monastic and episcopal authority, these writers formulated ascetic models for clergy and developed canonical norms for ecclesiastical governance. This chapter also suggests the importance, in this process of reflection, of the use of images, both figural and literary, as symbols that articulate synthesis without obviating tensions.

Chapters 5, 6, 8, and 9 investigate how the iconic thought inspired by Pseudo-Dionysius eventually influenced the production of artworks. These chapters not only highlight Dionysian motifs in specific artworks, but also pinpoint the theoretical frame that his thought offered to the conception of sacred art in the Mediterranean region up to the ninth century. Among the various facets to this conception of art, as they recur through the chapters, we should note the intended 'theophanic' purpose of artworks, that is their capacity to manifest the divine while operating an uplifting effect on the beholders, thus bring about their spiritual elevation. In particular, Chapter 5 by Katherine Marsengill explores how the late antique perception of a vertical arrangement of supernatural and intercessory powers became incorporated into Christian mentality by the sixth century. This arrangement apparently facilitated spiritual ascent because it functioned as a means for divine revelation and mediation. Pseudo-Dionysius articulated this Christian mindset, not just in terms of mysticism, but in the more practical visualisation of mediation. Marsengill maintains that portraits of holy men incorporated into visual programmes from the sixth century onward demonstrate the admittance of members into a hierarchy that extended beyond the most elevated saints to include other, more familiar figures in local communities.

In Chapter 6, Vladimir Ivanovici discusses the relationship between the architecture and decoration of churches built during the reign of

Emperor Justinian (527–65), liturgical performances, and the Pseudo-Dionysian idea of the theophanic potential of matter. According to Pseudo-Dionysius, liturgical performances functioned as genuine revelations, at least for the less educated members of their audiences. Ivanovici stresses on the one hand the existence of an under-explored perceptual dimension of the *mise en scène* of liturgical performances, and on the other their interaction with hierarchically organised space and decoration in churches built under Justinian. Through an array of artifices embedded in church architecture, decoration, and ritual performance, the faithful could imagine entering heaven and encountering angelic orders. This strategy was deployed to promote the sacraments as capable of collapsing heaven and earth, as well as to assert the hierarchical organisation of Christian communities and the wider society.

In Chapter 7, Mary B. Cunningham examines the reception of Pseudo-Dionysius' ideas about images as reflections of divine reality in the material world in the writings of the early eighth-century preacher, hymnographer, and archbishop, Andrew of Crete. Like Dionysius, Andrew understood the 'visual' metaphor as enabling Christians to ascend towards God, and therefore placed importance on 'images'. This chapter also attempts to determine whether Andrew of Crete sympathised openly with the iconophile cause.

In Chapter 8, Francesca Dell'Acqua maintains that Dionysius the Areopagite had a long-lasting impact on the way the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, that is, her transition to the afterlife, was imagined and represented in words and pictures in medieval Byzantium and in the West. In fact, a passage from Pseudo-Dionysius is believed by some to be the earliest authoritative account of Mary's Dormition. Eighth-century homilists, particularly Andrew of Crete and John of Damascus, explicitly quote Dionysius among their sources for the Dormition and connect Mary's Assumption into heaven to the belief that her womb had contained the uncontainable. Because the image of the Virgin Mary as 'Wider than the Heavens' (*Platyτέρα*) seems also to be alluded to by Pseudo-Dionysius, and its earliest known figural developments coincide in dating with the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, this chapter also suggests that the figural illustration of the *Platyτέρα* seems to reflect Pseudo-Dionysian thought.

In Chapter 9, Natalia B. Teteriatnikov examines the hierarchical system of decoration in churches which were built or refurbished after Iconoclasm. The role played by Pseudo-Dionysian thought in

ecclesiastical decoration of this period has been previously overlooked, probably because little is known about the perception of Pseudo-Dionysius and his writings in ninth-century Byzantium. A specific interest in his writings emerged during Iconoclasm, when both iconoclasts and iconodules had recourse to them in their apology or rejection of sacred images. Teteriatnikov suggests that the veneration of Dionysius the Areopagite as a saint, which was promoted after Iconoclasm, also stimulated an interest in his works, inspiring new layouts in Byzantine church decoration. In fact, in the second half of the ninth century, when centrally planned domed churches became popular and image veneration was re-established, the concept of the hierarchical order of celestial and terrestrial beings seemed to be stated through new schemes of decoration. Through a hierarchical order of images, churches could thus provide a link between heaven and earth, thereby mirroring the universe as conceived by Pseudo-Dionysius.

In sum, our collection embraces religious studies, philosophy, theology, art and architectural history. We hope it fulfils the original scope of the series in which it appears, offering an interdisciplinary view of specific questions about Byzantine culture and society to a broad academic and non-academic audience.

Four Oaks and Morimondo
September 2018

Francesca Dell'Acqua
Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi

NOTES

1. See Dell'Acqua (2014), for an overview of earlier literature.
2. Meyendorff (1993, 77) and Bogdanović (2011).
3. On Pseudo-Dionysius and the iconophiles, see Louth (1997, 2009), Cameron (1992, 24–27), Alexakis (1996, *passim*) and Cunningham (2014).
4. References to the anagogical, uplifting agency of sacred images are in *CH* I.2:121C; *CH* I.3:124A; *CH* II.4:144B; *EH* I.ii:373B; *EH* I.v:377A; *EH* V.ii:501C.
5. Louth (1997, 329).
6. Cameron (1992, 2–3).
7. The claim set forth by some scholars (for example, John Meyendorff) that Dionysius was read by the Christian thinkers who came after him through 'doctrinal correctives' has been debated by Golitzin (2002, 167).

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Evgenios Iverites is a monk of Iveron Monastery on Mt Athos. As a layman (Nicholas Marinides), he completed a Ph.D. at Princeton University (2014), with a dissertation on lay piety in Byzantium during the seventh century. From 2013 to 2016 he held a research post in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Basel, Switzerland, co-editing and translating the *Ecclesiastical History* of Gelasius of Caesarea (De Gruyter, 2017) and from 2016 to 2017 was scholar-in-residence at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts. His interest in Dionysius arose from early research for the thesis, as he investigated the place of laypeople and monks in late antique hierarchies, and has broadened into consideration of the significance of Areopagite thought for understanding humanity's place in church and cosmos today.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACO	<i>Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum</i> , ed. E. Schwartz, cont. J. Straub, Berlin, Leipzig 1914–.
BHG	<i>Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca</i> , F. Halkin (ed.), (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1957).
BMGS	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i>
ByzF	<i>Byzantinische Forschungen</i>
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CCCM	Corpus christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis (Turnhout: Brepols, 1966–).
CCSG	Corpus christianorum. Series Graeca (Turnhout: Brepols, Leuven: University Press, 1977–).
CCSL	Corpus christianorum. Series Latina (Turnhout: Brepols, Leuven: University Press, 1953).
COGD	Corpus Christianorum. Conciliorum oecumenicorum generaliumque decreta, Turnhout 2006–.
CPG	Clavis Patrum Graecorum
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Wien: C. Geroldi, 1866–).
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
EO	<i>Échos d'Orient</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library (London: E. Heinemann, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1912–).

Mansi	<i>Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio</i> , J. D. Mansi (ed.), 53 vols. (Firenze, 1759; repr. Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1960–1962).
ODB	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i>
OECS	Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford 1990–).
PG	Patrologia cursus completus. Series Graeca, J. P. Migne (ed.), Paris, 1857–1886.
PL	Patrologia cursus completus. Series Latina, J. P. Migne (ed.), Paris, 1879–1974
PO	Patrologia Orientalis (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1903–).
PPS	St. Vladimir's Seminary Press Popular Patristics Series (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press).
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1964–).
SC	Sources Chrétiennes (Paris, Lyon: Cerf, 1941–).
Settimane	Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo
StP	<i>Studia Patristica</i> [Proceedings of the International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford] (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1957–; Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982–; Leuven: Peeters, 1989–).
SVThQ	<i>St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly</i>

PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS' WORKS

CD	S. Dionysii Areopagitae <i>Opera Omnia</i> , B. Cordier (ed.), PG 3; <i>Corpus Dionysiacum</i> I, B. R. Suchla (ed.), PTS 33 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990); <i>Corpus Dionysiacum</i> II, G. Heil and A. M. Ritter (eds.), PTS 36 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991, 2012 ²).
CH	Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, <i>De coelesti hierarchia</i> , in <i>Corpus Dionysiacum</i> II, G. Heil (ed.), PTS 36 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991, 2012 ²), 3–59.
EH	Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, <i>De ecclesiastica hierarchia</i> , in <i>Corpus Dionysiacum</i> II, G. Heil (ed.), PTS 36 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991, 2012 ²), 61–132.
DN	Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, <i>De divinis nominibus</i> , in <i>Corpus Dionysiacum</i> I, B. R. Suchla (ed.), PTS 33 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990).
MTh	Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, <i>De mystica theologia</i> , in <i>Corpus Dionysiacum</i> II, A. M. Ritter (ed.), PTS 36 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991, 2012 ²), 139–150.

- Ep.* Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, *Epistolae*, in *Corpus Dionysiacum* II, A. M. Ritter (ed.), PTS 36 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991, 2012²), 151–210.
- Luibheid and Rorem (trans.), 1987 Pseudo-Dionysius. *The Complete Works*, C. Luibheid and P. Rorem (trans.), (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987).
- Bellini and Scazzoso (trans.), 1981 Dionigi Areopagita, *Tutte le Opere. Gerarchia Celeste—Gerarchia Ecclesiastica—Nomi Divini—Teologia Mistica—Lettere*, Italian trans. P. Scazzoso, ed. E. Bellini (trans.), I Classici del Pensiero, sez. I, Filosofia Classica e Tardo Antica (Milano: Rusconi, 1981). 2nd ed., I. Ramelli (revision), *Il pensiero occidentale* (Milano: Bompiani, 2009).

N.B.

Although some contributors preferred to quote either from the PG or the CD, the majority of the quotations from the CD given in this volume are indicated according to the following style: <Title abbreviated>.<chapter in upper-case Roman numeral>.<section in Arabic numeral>:<PG 3 column(s)>; <page(s) in De Gruyter edition (PTS 33 or 36)>, in some cases also the <line(s) in PTS edition>; trans. Luibheid and Rorem, 1987, <page(s)>. For example: *DN* VII.2:869A; 196, 12–16; trans. Luibheid and Rorem, 1987, 107. In the case of *EH*, after the section, the indication of the subsection in lower-case Roman numeral may follow. For example: *EH* IV.iii.1:473C; 96, 5–14; trans. Luibheid and Rorem, 1987, 225–6.

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CHAPTER 1

Reassessing the Historico-Doctrinal Background of Pseudo-Dionysius’ Image Theory

Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi

UNDERSTANDING PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS’ PSEUDO-EPIGRAPHIC STRATEGY

In order to understand correctly the main concepts that define Pseudo-Dionysius’ visual thought—that is *symbolon* (‘symbol’), *eikōn* (‘image, icon’), *eikonographía* (‘iconography’), *hierographía* (‘sacred description’), *ágalma* (‘image, statue’), and so on—a threefold approach should be taken. Firstly, it is important to frame their significance within the ‘Dionysian system’. Secondly, it is necessary to focus on the possible original objectives of the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Finally, a comprehensive look at the sources of the *Corpus* and at the historical context in which it emerged is required.

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One of the fundamental characteristics of Pseudo-Dionysius' strategy is to talk about issues debated in his own time, that is, the early sixth century, through references capable of disguising anachronism, since he pretends to be writing during the first century, and presents himself as the disciple of St Paul, who is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (17, 34). Not only did the author of the *Corpus* avoid the use of terminology that had not yet appeared at the time when the real Dionysius the Areopagite lived. He also purposefully allocated the treatment of problems debated in his own time (but anachronistic for apostolic times) to discussions, allusions, and references scattered throughout his writings, in order to express his point of view while masking the anachronism that put into the mouth of a Father of the apostolic age issues that were debated in the fifth and sixth centuries.

In the next pages, we shall discuss themes that constitute Pseudo-Dionysius' doctrinal objectives through a network of references within the text of the *Corpus* that we shall call 'synchronic structures'. By this expression I refer to the choice made by Pseudo-Dionysius of elaborating specific topics through arguments scattered in several textual places of the *Corpus*. The main recognisable 'synchronic structures' behind the *Corpus* are Christology, the theory of hierarchy (i.e. the rationale for the order of angels and men in hierarchies), the theme of *koinonía* (that is 'communion'), anti-pagan polemics, and the theory of symbols, which is closely connected to the question of the exegetical method.¹ Dionysius probably developed the theory of symbols, in a phase of elaboration of the *Corpus* when he also developed the themes of hierarchy, *koinonía*, and liturgy, that is, the 'cosmological' and ecclesiological aspects of his system, and, at the same time, took into consideration the main themes of the theological debate of his own time. In the earlier phase of his work, he focused instead on the problem of the unions and distinctions in God, on apophaticism, and on the processions that are indicated by the divine names. In dealing with these aspects, Pseudo-Dionysius adopted a lexicon that appears to be indebted to the Neoplatonic roots of his formation.²

I shall begin by summarising the methodology that undergirds the composition of the *Corpus* and by looking at the time in which this took shape.³ Then I will seek to discover whether the discussion of the image theory can be connected to any debate or controversy that took place in the early sixth century, when the *Corpus* emerged. In other words, I shall try to retrace the historical and doctrinal background to Pseudo-Dionysius' treatment of symbolic, iconic, and exegetical theology together with his exegesis of the Scriptures. In particular, I shall address the following

question: Does Dionysius' symbolic method aim merely at providing a sort of handbook for interpreting scriptural and liturgical symbols inherent to the celestial and the ecclesiastical hierarchies, or does it also have the purpose of contributing to the intellectual debate of his own time?

EVIDENCE OF EIKONIC THINKING IN THE EARLY SIXTH CENTURY

We know very little about the cult of sacred images in the Christian East during the centuries preceding Byzantine iconoclasm, especially with regards to a theology of holy images, as already noted by Ernst Kitzinger in his important study of 1954.⁴ However, we should consider the fact that the Church Fathers who dealt with aesthetic issues approached them from an eminently philosophical point of view, at an abstract level, never or rarely referring to actual works of art or to their use for liturgical or devotional purposes.⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius is no exception.

We must take into account the traces of Pseudo-Dionysian teaching on the anagogical function of the image that appear in a series of questions addressed by the metropolitan bishop Hypatius of Ephesus to his suffragan bishop Julian of Adramitum. We can frame this correspondence as a sort of debate on the legitimacy of sacred images *avant la lettre*. It is no coincidence that this correspondence has been transmitted in *florilegia* collated in the context of the iconoclastic dispute.⁶ Since Hypatius wrote in the years immediately following the appearance of the *Corpus*, the issues to which he refers may reflect an ongoing debate—a debate which Pseudo-Dionysius could have also taken into account in his own reflection on the theoretical status of symbols and images.⁷

I begin my analysis by advancing the hypothesis that the *Corpus* was produced within the theological circles gravitating around Justinian. I have elsewhere illustrated the hypothesis that the *Corpus* may reflect the political-theological programme that Justinian outlined in the early years of his government while he was counselor to his uncle the emperor Justin (518–527), before becoming himself *basileus*.⁸ A contemporary painted icon can help us to broaden our understanding of how figural arts functioned in the cultural context from which the Pseudo-Dionysian *Corpus* originated. The icon is the famous painting of Christ in encaustic on wood, preserved at the monastery of St Catherine at the foot of Mount Sinai. It was probably painted either in Constantinople or *in loco* by an artist from the capital city and probably arrived at Sinai

when Justinian built the monastery.⁹ Fr Maximos Constas posits that the asymmetry of Christ's facial features refers to the historico-eschatological polarity between his first and his second coming. This polarity does not show the union of natures in Christ according to the diphysite theology, as has often been supposed. Instead, its function is to reveal the salvific divine action effected by Christ's personal intervention in this world, which operates in two distinct ways according to his two comings. This icon was painted in a period and within geographical coordinates that were affected by the expansion of Origenism, i.e. the heterodox doctrines based on Origen's and Evagrius' teaching concerning the last things, particularly, their dismissing of the role of the physical body after the Last Judgment. Justinian and the Church of Constantinople took a firm stance against Origenism, culminating in its official condemnation by the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553). In this regard, Constas advanced the hypothesis that the Sinai icon was a visual refutation of the Origenist eschatology that denied the severity of the Final Judgment.¹⁰

Another significant case of theological-apologetic use of an image, dating back to same years and linked to Justinian's circle, is the invention of the *acheiropoietos* icon of Edessa in c.544, which should be contextualised against the background of the local Christological conflict between Monophysites and pro-Chalcedonians, and therefore seen as a pro-Chalcedonian propaganda tool.¹¹

The three aforementioned cases, that is the debate between Hypatius and Julian and the icons of Sinai and Edessa, although conceived with different doctrinal objectives in mind, show how the entourage of Justinian, which included representatives of the Chalcedonian clergy such as Hypatius and hierarchs from Edessa and shared a critical stance against Origenism, also shared an iconophile tendency. A similarly tight interweaving of religion and politics would mark the controversy over sacred images at a pan-ecumenical level between the eighth and the ninth centuries. The fact that the *Corpus* began to circulate in the early years of Justinian's government, and that it exerted a considerable impact on almost all of the then current theological preoccupations in different areas of the empire starting from the capital,¹² allows us to think that Pseudo-Dionysian thought emerged at a time when sacred images were already seen as vehicles of theological ideas.

At this point, I wish to advance another hypothesis, with regards to that the symbolic and exegetical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius was addressed to real interlocutors, having specific objectives that integrated

the domains of figural imagery and theology. The relevance of the iconic theme within the economy of the *Corpus* is confirmed by various references that its author makes to one of his writings, namely the *Treatise on Symbolic Theology*, that either was lost, or never written. Bearing in mind that the author of the *Corpus* was writing in the guise of Dionysius of Athens, a disciple of St Paul, with the *Treatise on Symbolic Theology* he probably meant to underline how the exegesis of the symbols proceeds from a traditional and ecclesial teaching.¹³

SYMBOLIC THEOLOGY AND BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

One of the first aspects which stands out in the image and symbol theory propounded in the *Corpus* is its fundamental link with biblical exegesis. The rationale of the relationship between symbols and sacred text is absolutely essential to the Pseudo-Dionysian idea of symbolism and can be summarised as follows. First of all, symbols must be understood as a general category, of which visual images represent one of the species together with symbols auditory, olfactory, gestural, and so on.¹⁴ The primary function of symbols is to be a material and sensible support to the knowledge of the immaterial and invisible reality. Humankind cannot do without symbols in order to rise to the knowledge of what transcends the domain of sensible reality.¹⁵ The symbol is therefore a medium of elevation in knowledge and spiritual perfection, and acts through hierarchy, which is itself symbolic:

Our own hierarchy is itself symbolical and adapted to what we are. In a divine fashion it needs sensible things to lift us up into the domain of the intelligible.¹⁶

However, the role of hierarchy is not limited to uplifting knowledge from the sensible to the intelligible. It also brings knowledge beyond the limits of the intellect towards the realities of ineffable and mystical theology, which must be kept distinct from philosophical and rational knowledge¹⁷:

Theological tradition has a dual aspect, the ineffable and mystical on the one hand, the open and more evident on the other. The one resorts to symbolism and involves the mysteries. The other is philosophic and employs the method of demonstration. (Further, the inexpressible is

bound up with what can be articulated.) The one uses persuasion and imposes the truthfulness of what is asserted. The other acts and, by means of a mystery which cannot be taught, it puts souls firmly in the presence of God.¹⁸

The symbol is an unavoidable element in spiritual life, both with regards to theory of knowledge (gnoseology), and to the uplifting movement towards God (anagogy). The choice of symbols and their interpretation cannot take place outside the traditional teaching of their inner meaning:

For of course one cannot use sacred symbols haphazardly. They have to be explicated in whatever way that is appropriate to the causes, subsistences, powers, orders, and dignities of which they are the revealing signs.¹⁹

Pseudo-Dionysius' answer on this point is clear and unequivocal already in the first paragraph of the *Celestial Hierarchy*: symbols are transmitted by the Scriptures, and it is only with reference to scriptural revelation that their anagogical power and their correct understanding is possible. This explains why symbolic theology is primarily concerned with the exegesis of sacred texts.

While framing the 'science of symbols' within the stream of Christian tradition starting with the Sacred Scriptures, Pseudo-Dionysius stresses on several occasions that the formation of symbols and their interpretation is subject to an initiatory imparting, from which the profane are and must remain excluded.²⁰ To underline better that symbols have to be interpreted in light of the scriptural revelation, Pseudo-Dionysius coined a neologism: ἱεροπλαστία, that is 'sacred figuration'.²¹ This esoteric motif which stresses the need of hiding the interpretation of symbols probably was meant to offer a hint of the secrecy that was common among early Christian communities, and thus to further support the claim that the author of the *Corpus* was a disciple of St Paul. But we may suppose that by this motif Pseudo-Dionysius above all wishes to emphasise that the interpretation of symbols must take place in the context of hierarchical (i.e. ecclesial) teaching.

Dionysius' insistence on symbols probably is also related to a much more cogent and current historiographical question, namely the need to offer an answer to the impasse which affected biblical exegesis, as a result from the opposition between the schools of Alexandria and Antioch. Such contrast appeared in reaction to Alexandrian allegorism and to the

wide influence exerted by Origen, its major representative. The debate between the supporters of the two schools brought to light the methodological limits of Alexandrian biblical exegesis based on the mere opinion of the interpreter, and a more solid criterion was sought after. A similar critique emerged within the context of pagan apologetics, especially with the Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry, one of the earliest and most caustic critics of the more speculative expressions of Christianity.²² This critique was destined to re-emerge later also among Christian exegetes.

Although referring to the Origenist exegesis and not rejecting the allegorical method, the Cappadocian Fathers, active during the fourth century, criticised its application in an exclusively spiritualistic way. They demonstrate an awareness that this kind of approach to the Sacred Scriptures requires caution on the part of the interpreter in order to avoid trespassing the boundaries of Christian faith.²³ For example, Basil the Great takes a firm stance against unspecified authors, addressed as 'forgers of the truth' with regard to their allegorical interpretation of the Bible. This accusation perhaps hints at Origen himself.²⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, active in the years following the attempt of Emperor Julian to restore paganism, was confronted with the problems raised by the exegesis of Hellenic myths promoted in that cultural context, in which the teaching of Iamblichus played a major role. The latter maintained that even if pagan myths display obscene external meanings, their inner meaning conveys a philosophical truth that can be found through symbolic exegesis. Gregory of Nazianzus admits that the Christian scriptures also have a hidden meaning, but they never come to point of exhibiting a total discrepancy between their literal meaning and their inner one, as is often the case with pagan myths.²⁵

In the years following the Cappadocian Fathers, the school of Antioch, with Diodorus of Tarsus and, above all, his disciple Theodore of Mopsuestia, developed a different and more radical position, openly hostile to allegorism. Antiochene literalism, insisting on the historicity of the biblical text, ended up denying its spiritual interpretation, moving away from the more balanced position of the Cappadocians. The Antiochene position had consequences not only for the possibility of using the Scriptures for ascetic-pastoral purposes, but even for the form of the textual canon. Theodore, who was the main exponent of this school, went so far as to deny any allegorical reading of the *Song of Songs*, considering this poem as a mere example of erotic literature. Moreover, he maintained a strict position in offering purely historical exegesis of

most of the books of the Old Testament. Such a position also called into question the validity of the fundamental criterion that had up to then supported Christian exegesis of the Old Testament, namely the typological prefiguration of Christ's coming in the sacred scriptures of Israel.²⁶

Antiochene criticism was destined to have a wide resonance. In the early sixth century Theodore's exegetical method was still at the centre of a critical debate. Moreover, Theodore also was accused of holding a Christology too close to that of Nestorius. A direct attack against Theodore was launched by Leontius of Byzantium, one of the leading Byzantine theologians active in the first half of the sixth century.²⁷ Passages from Theodore's literal exegesis of the Scriptures were quoted and condemned at the Fifth Ecumenical Council (i.e. Second Council of Constantinople, 553) in relation to the Christological implications they entailed.²⁸ We can therefore conclude that when Pseudo-Dionysius was writing his *Corpus*, the debate on the exegetical method of Scriptures and the various problems it involved was ongoing.

THE TARGETS OF PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS' INTERVENTION

Evidence of these discussions can be found in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. On the one hand, the author of the *Corpus* clearly intends to endorse the canon of the Bible from the authoritative position of his pretended apostolic authority (especially with regards to those books that were questioned by the anti-allegorist critique, such as the *Song of Songs*, or whose canonicity was not unanimously approved yet, such as *Revelation*). On the one hand, Pseudo-Dionysius emphasises that these and other historical books of the Old Testament were meant to reveal the action of divine providence and the hierarchy according to the Law, and thus had a full spiritual sense.²⁹ On the other hand, Pseudo-Dionysius adds an explicit reference to the typological value of the Old Testament, stating that in its pages the 'future works of Jesus' are 'written in figures'.³⁰

Besides canonical and scriptural concerns, Pseudo-Dionysius intends to rehabilitate the possibility of interpreting the sacred texts *beyond* their literal sense, but nonetheless on a solid epistemic ground.³¹ However, Pseudo-Dionysius was probably aware that he could achieve this goal only by advancing a vigorous correction to the Origenist approach. In fact, the doctrinal problem underlying Origen's concept of symbol is not limited to the apparent arbitrariness of his allegorical readings. It is also related to his wider understanding of the ecclesial tradition and the

transmission of sacred knowledge and of deifying divine gifts. Origen uses the terms 'symbol' and 'symbolic' in the context of his scriptural exegesis. He draws a radical distinction between the external and literal sense, which reflects the sensible reality, and the spiritual sense, which considers the intellectual domain. In light of Plato, Origen believes the literal sense to correspond to a wholly inferior degree of reality, and to be substantially independent from the spiritual sense.³² Origen applies this notion also to the Eucharist. Without denying the reality of the sacrament, he conceives of the Eucharist as a symbol of the union between the soul and the Logos, whose value is to be appreciated in its mediating role, which will be fully effective only in the eschatological time.³³

According to Origen, the inner meaning conveyed by scriptural symbols involves the advancement of intellectual knowledge, whose ultimate goal is to attain full enlightenment, even if this can be achieved only at the end of time. Origen identifies deification with intellectual illumination, whose uppermost goal was attaining the union with the eternal Logos, rather than in ecclesial communion with the incarnate Logos, whose presence in history is perpetuated through sacramental and ecclesial life.³⁴ The spiritual comprehension of scriptural symbols constitutes, then, the first step of a journey of the soul: once liberated from the body and from history, the soul points straightforwardly to its fulfilment in the *noûs*, that is, attaining intellectual illumination.

To the Origenian concept of spiritual perfection as intellectual (noetic) illumination, Pseudo-Dionysius opposes a historical and immediate spiritual achievement through sacramental and ecclesial life which entails deification in proportion to the proper capacity of each one (κατ' οἰκείαν ἀναλογίαν).³⁵ Pseudo-Dionysian deification is accomplished through the anagogical movement entailed in the three steps on which all the structure of the hierarchical order depends: 'purification' (κάθαρσις), 'illumination' (ἐλλαμψις/φωτισμός), and 'perfection' (τελείωσις).³⁶ This progression indicates unambiguously that the apex of deification transcends intellectual (noetic) knowledge, which corresponds to the degree of illumination. The Pseudo-Dionysian hierarchical and ecclesiastical framework therefore implies that the symbol is not merely a sign from which an intelligible truth has to be extrapolated, but it is the truth itself, which is given in the context of the hierarchical transmission of the divine gifts.

We now touch upon a fundamental point for understanding Pseudo-Dionysian symbolic theology: the symbol derives its effectiveness neither

from its intrinsic meaning, nor from its form, nor from a power which belongs to its being. Instead, the rationale behind symbols is to be found in the synergy between the members of the hierarchy and the divine (i.e. thearchic) energies that are transmitted in descending order through the hierarchy.³⁷ Accordingly, it is not the symbol itself or the intellect that makes the symbol an instrument of anagogy (i.e. of spiritual ascension); rather, its divine institution—which is revealed through the hierarchy—is responsible for this.

THE SOURCES OF PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS' SYMBOLIC THEOLOGY: THE CAPPADOCIAN FATHERS

Origenian intellectualism was, in my view, the main target of Pseudo-Dionysius' critique, because he identified it as the paradigm that had to be overcome in order to re-establish the hermeneutics of scriptural symbols on the basis of hierarchical law, and thus reassert the allegorical method of scriptural exegesis. As in the case of other facets of Pseudo-Dionysian thought, there are two kinds of sources that need be considered, namely the patristic-ecclesiastical tradition and Neoplatonic philosophy.

It is widely accepted that within the vast landscape of Pseudo-Dionysian sources a central position is occupied by the Cappadocian Fathers. From them, the author of the *Corpus* drew several fundamental elements of his thought, such as apophatic theology, trinitarian doctrine, the doctrine of deification (*théōsis*), the theory of the divine names, and the order of angels.³⁸ Specific textual and doctrinal evidences allow us to verify that even in the case of symbolic theology, the Cappadocians offered a model to Pseudo-Dionysius. This is the case, for example, of an expression, 'χειραγωγία', which occurs often in Cappadocians writings, and with which Pseudo-Dionysius outlines one of the fundamental aspects of his theory of the symbol: sensible symbols (also called 'material figures and forms') are the 'guidance' (χειραγωγία, lit. 'leading by the hand') that human knowledge cannot do without in order to attain knowledge of intelligible realities.³⁹ In this regard, in the first chapter of the *Celestial Hierarchy* Pseudo-Dionysius states with programmatic intent:

All this accounts for the fact that the sacred institution and source of perfection established our most pious hierarchy. He modeled it on the hierarchies of heaven, and clothed these immaterial hierarchies in numerous

material figures and forms (ἀϋλους ἱεραρχίας ὑλαίοις σχήμασι καὶ μορφωτικαῖς συνθέσεσι) so that, in a way appropriate to our nature, we might be uplifted from these most venerable images (ἀπὸ τῶν ἱερωτάτων πλάσεων) to interpretations and assimilations which are simple and inexpressible. For it is quite impossible that we humans should, in any immaterial way, rise up to imitate and to contemplate the heavenly hierarchies without the aid of those material means capable of guiding us (εἰ μὴ τῇ κατ' αὐτὸν ὑλαίᾳ χειραγωγίᾳ) as our nature requires.⁴⁰

This passage resumes concepts and terms that derive from Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa.⁴¹ The expression χειραγωγία does not occur in other sources of Pseudo-Dionysius—neither among the Neoplatonists, or in Origen. This should not surprise us, because according to the philosophical mindset that shaped those speculative contexts, consistent with a pre-Christian cosmos-centred vision of the world, the sensible reality cannot bring to the knowledge of the Intelligible. For the Cappadocian Fathers instead this was possible, because they saw in the sensible creation a sign through which the Creator provides guidance towards his knowledge, a knowledge which is otherwise inaccessible.

The identification of the Cappadocian Fathers as an inspiration for Pseudo-Dionysian symbolic theology is of great doctrinal importance for two reasons. First of all, it shows that even in this area, as was already the case within the theological and ontological domains, the author of the *Corpus* looked to these three Fathers as a model of orthodoxy. (This adds another piece of evidence to the hypothesis that one of the strategic goals of the pseudo-epigraphic *Corpus* was to consolidate the historical and doctrinal physiognomy of the Byzantine theological tradition.⁴²) Second, Pseudo-Dionysius found in the teaching of the Cappadocians a theory of the image already developed.

THE THEORY OF THE IMAGE IN THE CAPPADOCIAN FATHERS

Challenged by Arian opponents, the Cappadocians turned to the theology of the image elaborated in the years of the First Council of Nicaea (325), principally by Athanasius of Alexandria, as a key argument for the refutation of Arian trinitarian subordinationism, which argued for an inferiority of the Son to the Father.⁴³ The recourse to the *eikonic* theme in order to demonstrate the divinity of the Word of God finds its scriptural background in the biblical account of the creation of mankind⁴⁴ and in the New Testamentary passages that define the Word

as an 'icon' (image) of the invisible God.⁴⁵ The fact that man is said to have been created 'in' the image and likeness of God, while the Word is defined simply as 'image', reveals that the Scripture wanted to stress the difference of their natures: the Word is the archetypal image, and his nature is other than its created copy, while he is connatural to the Father, of which he is the natural image.⁴⁶

In a passage from the treatise *On the Holy Spirit* destined to have a great resonance in iconic thought and its modern interpretations, Basil the Great states that 'the honour rendered to an image passes to its prototype', maintaining that, in the case of an artificial image, the connection between the copy and its model is by means of imitation, while, in the case of the Son and the Father, the link between the image and the model is by nature (φυσικῶς).⁴⁷ As some scholars have pointed out, the theology of the image in the Cappadocian Fathers adopts Platonic terminology when referring to the pair of interrelated terms *eikōn* and *prōtotypōn*.⁴⁸ However, I wish to underline that their thought diverges from the Platonic assumption that there is an ontological degradation between the intelligible prototype and its sensible copy.

Starting from the discussions and the solutions developed by the First Council of Nicea, the Cappadocians took a step further, triggering a paradigm shift that had a revolutionary impact on the history of Christian theological and philosophical thought. This step further consisted in the distinction between essence and hypostasis. This not only resulted in a dogmatic solution to the Trinitarian problem, as it would be canonised by the Second Ecumenical Council (Constantinople 381), but it also established the question of the image on a ground of unprecedented fruitfulness. If the eternal relationship existing between the Father and the Son, who are coessential by nature, can be described in terms of 'being the image of', which entails a hypostatic relationship and not a difference in nature, then the concept of image here implied cannot constitute in any way an ontological degradation of its archetype. According to the Cappadocians, in fact, the hypostasis does not imply the idea of an ontological descent (as it does in Neoplatonism), but constitutes the very ontological condition for the activity of the essence.⁴⁹ This is true not only of the Trinity, but also of the cosmos, insofar as the image relies on the hypostasis and not on nature: indeed essence cannot produce images of itself, but it is only the hypostasis that can produce an image of itself.⁵⁰

These aspects can be better understood by taking into account that eastern patristic thought does not admit that essences have a separate

metaphysical existence—as Platonic archetypes—but sees them as encompassed in the Divine Wisdom before coming into being.⁵¹ Essences come into being only through hypostases.⁵² The existence of the essence is therefore inseparable from the existence of its hypostasis, and its subsistence in the Divine Wisdom cannot be other than meontological, that is related to the non-being. Otherwise it would fall back into the Platonic paradigm, with which, however, it has often been misinterpreted, even by modern scholars: this explains also the insistence of Pseudo-Dionysius on this point.⁵³

The originality of Cappadocian thought was not only limited to the distinction between essence and hypostasis. The three Fathers brought to the centre of their reflection also another basic ontological and gnosological distinction, between essence and energies. This distinction was already a stock-in-trade of mainstream philosophical thought. But through the Cappadocians it was destined to exert an extraordinary impact on the history of eastern patristic and Byzantine thought. The essence is ineffable, incomprehensible, and inparticipable, and can be only known and participated through its energies, that is, its operations or acts.⁵⁴

The theory of energies is also linked to the ontological distinction between essence and hypostasis, since the energies of the essence have no other way of being manifested in action other than in the hypostasis; and, through it, they can operate in the cosmos. If the image, as we have seen, is a means of hypostatic relationships, we must conclude that a communication of energies between different essences takes place in it. In this way, material icons become a means of communion between hypostases through the energies of their respective natures, which are transmitted from the prototype to its depicted image.

Through these speculative paths, the Cappadocian theory of image managed to overcome innovatively the aporias of participation which had been developed by Platonism and Neoplatonism.⁵⁵ Moving on the ground of Trinitarian theology, the Cappadocians came to a new understanding of this theoretical problem by viewing participation not as a contact or combination of essences, but rather as a *transmission* of energies, and by identifying the hypostasis as the place in which this communication is achieved. The image of the hypostasis—regardless of its nature, it either takes form within intellectual contemplation or in material representation—is thus conceived as the ‘place’ in which the energies of its prototype operate. This model of participation can be defined

as *koinonic*, as it originates from the concept of communion (κοινωνία) between the divine and the human. This communion is accomplished within the economy of salvation as an encounter between distinct and ontologically irreducible natures, which finds its foundation in the Incarnation of the Son of God.

By defining the dogma of the unconfused union of the divine and the human nature in the hypostasis of the incarnate Word, the Council of Chalcedon (451), which was treading on the path prepared by the Cappadocian ontological reflection, formulated a new principle: the hypostasis is not only what allows the energies of an essence to operate, but is also what allows synergy between different natures. In the case of the Incarnation of the Word, the hypostasis encompasses the unconfused union of the divine and the human nature; in the case of the deification of man, it enables the synergy of the divine and the human energies in each person.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS TO IMAGE THEORY

Following the Byzantine incarnational theory of salvation and deification in line with the Cappadocians and the Definition of Chalcedon, Pseudo-Dionysius developed the iconic theme both in its general theoretical framing and in the discussion of some of its specific issues, to which we now turn. Among these issues, one of the most relevant is the correlation between immanence and transcendence that is implied in the concept of image.⁵⁶ About the resemblance between the created image and the uncreated divine prototype recalled in the biblical narrative of the creation of man, in the chapter of the *Divine Names* devoted to ‘likeness’, Pseudo-Dionysius states:

If one calls God ‘similar’ (ὅμοιον) to indicate that he is selfsame (ταυτόν), as being wholly and in all ways, singularly and indivisibly, like to himself, the divine name ‘similar’ (τὴν τοῦ ὁμοίου θεωνυμίαν) should not be rejected. The theologians say that the transcendent God is inherently similar to no other being (τὸν ὑπὲρ πάντα θεόν, ἧ αὐτός, οὐδενὶ φασιν εἶναι ὅμοιον), but that he also bestows a similarity to himself on all those who are returning to him in imitation, as far as possible, of what is beyond all definition and understanding (αὐτὸν δὲ ὁμοιότητα θεῖαν δωρεῖσθαι τοῖς ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἐπιστρεφόμενοις τῇ κατὰ δύναμιν μιμήσει τὸν ὑπὲρ πάντα καὶ ὄρον καὶ λόγον.). It is the power of the divine similarity (ἡ τῆς θείας ὁμοιότητος δύναμις) which returns (ἐπιστρέφουσα) all created things

toward their Cause, and these things must be reckoned to be similar to God by reason of the divine image and likeness (ταῦτα γοῦν ῥητέον ὁμοία θεῷ καὶ κατὰ θεϊαν εἰκόνα καὶ ὁμοίωσιν).⁵⁷ But we cannot say that God is similar to them, any more than we can say that man is similar to his own portrait (οὐδὲ γὰρ αὐτοῖς τὸν θεὸν ὁμοιον, ὅτι μηδὲ ἄνθρωπος τῇ ἰδίᾳ εἰκόνι ὁμοιος). Things on the same level may be similar to one another with the result that similarity can be predicated of either of them. And they can be similar to each other through the workings of a prior form of similarity which they share. But an interchange of this sort cannot be admitted in regard to Cause and effects (ἐπὶ δὲ τοῦ αἰτίου καὶ τῶν αἰτιατῶν οὐκ ἀποδεξόμεθα τὴν ἀντιστροφὴν), for God does not grant similarity merely to some objects. He is in fact the Cause of this in all that have the quality of similarity. He is the subsistence of absolute similarity, and all the similarity in the world is similar to a trace of the divine similarity so that all creation is thereby made a unity.⁵⁸

With regard to ‘likeness’ (ὁμοίωσις, ὁμοιότης) understood as a divine name related to God, Pseudo-Dionysius says that God is ‘similar’ inasmuch he is always the same and similar to himself. A thorough discussion of this particular name raises the question of resemblance between God and his creatures: if indeed God is beyond any analogy with created beings because he is ineffable, how can a creature be considered similar to him? Dionysius proposes the following solution: he introduces an asymmetry with regards to being ‘in the likeness’ of God by declaring that what is caused (creatures) is similar to the cause (God), but not vice versa (i.e., the ‘interchange’, ἀντιστροφή, is not possible). This asymmetry seems to imply a directionality, which parallels the descending transmission of the divine energies through the heavenly and ecclesiastical hierarchies. Similarly, this asymmetry excludes the possibility that likeness implies the participation of the creature in the nature of God. Asymmetry should rather be seen as an activity-energy of the cause, that is, God, which acts on his creatures without affecting his own essence. Adding that all things ‘are returned’ to God by the means of similarity, Pseudo-Dionysius reveals that his conception of the return (ἐπιστροφή) is not an autonomous motion of created things, but an energy which originates from the superior Cause and converts the creature to itself, according to the hierarchical model of downward transmission.

Then Pseudo-Dionysius comes to deal with the source par excellence of the doctrine of likeness, the creation of man according to Genesis

1:26. The human being ‘in the likeness’ of God does not correspond to God being in the likeness of man, in the same way in which a man does not resemble his portrait. I believe that this last statement refers to the distance between the nature of man and the material nature of his portrait—assuming that the Greek *eikōn* here is correctly rendered by ‘portrait’, rather than referring to an abstract image in the theoretical sense. Also in this case, likeness implies the causal relationship between the hypostasis and its image, since it is the hypostasis that is concretely represented and not its abstract nature, while dissimilarity can imply both natural and hypostatic difference. The statement that likeness is a gift that is given to those who convert to God by imitating his ineffable properties finally opens up the energetic-hypostatic meaning behind this text.⁵⁹

The argument of non-reciprocity in likeness between the cause and the caused, between God and his creatures, is also treated in the second chapter of the *Divine Names*, which is probably later than the other parts of the treatise.⁶⁰ Here likeness is not indicated by the word ὁμοίωσις, the term found in the Septuagint Greek of Genesis 1:26 and widely used by Neoplatonic philosophers, but by its synonym ἐμφάρεια, which had little circulation in the philosophical literature, but is well attested in the iconological lexicon that was in vogue during the Arian controversy.⁶¹ In the following passage the image is meant as manifesting the cause in the caused reality:

In reality there is no exact likeness between caused and cause (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔστιν ἀκριβὴς ἐμφάρεια τοῖς αἰτιατοῖς καὶ τοῖς αἰτίοις), for the caused carry within themselves the images of their causes which are possible for them (ἀλλ’ ἔχει μὲν τὰ αἰτιατὰ τὰς τῶν αἰτίων ἐνδεχομένας εἰκόνας), whereas the causes themselves are located in a realm transcending the caused, according to the argument regarding their principle (κατὰ τὸν τῆς οἰκείας ἀρχῆς λόγον).⁶²

The other two occurrences of the term ἐμφάρεια that are attested in the *Corpus*, both in the *Celestial Hierarchy*, designate the assimilation of the celestial powers to the divine likeness:

[The holy ranks of heavenly beings] imitate the divine through intellectual processes and look on the thearchical likeness (θεαρχικὴν ἐμφάρεϊαν) with a transcendent eye (ὑπερκοσμίως ὁρᾶσαι). They model (μορφοῦν) their intellectual form (νοερὸν εἶδος) on him. Hence it is natural for them to

enter into a more generous communion with the Thearchy (ἔχουσι τὰς πρὸς αὐτὴν κοινωνίας).⁶³

Each designation (ἐπωνυμία) of the essences far superior to us indicates the properties that imitate God and are conformed to Him (τὰς θεομιμήτους αὐτῶν ἐμφαίνει τοῦ θεοειδοῦς ιδιότηας). The revealing name of ‘dominions’ signifies (...) a lifting up which is free (...) and not inclined toward any of those tyrannical dissimilarities which characterize a harsh dominion. (...) In conformity with the good and according to its capacity, it moulds (διαπλάττουσαν) itself and its subordinates toward the dominating semblance [of that principle of domination] (πρὸς τὴν αὐτῆς [κυριαρχίας] κυρίαν ἐμφέρειαν).⁶⁴

From these passages we can infer that, according to the occurrence of the pairing image-likeness in its various lexical configurations, the image relates to the sphere of ontological subsistence, while likeness is involved in the discourse on participation in divine activities in the created world.⁶⁵

A further elaboration of the concept of image found in the *Corpus* involves its ontological meaning as a species or form (εἶδος). Form is defined according to morphogenetic action, that is, the generation of forms, which is exerted by the ‘divinity of the Son’. The Son is indeed the causative and informing Form:

The divinity of Jesus is the fulfilling cause of all. (...) It is the form which gives form in the formless as principle of the form, but it is also formless in the forms since it is superior to form. It is the essence pervading all essences and remains unaffected thereby, and it is set above all essences in a super-essential fashion.⁶⁶

The nature of the relationship between the non-formal archetype and the image is further outlined discussing the divine name of Light, which constitutes the ontological premise of visibility and formability:

Light comes from the Good, and light is an image of this archetypal Good. Thus the Good is also praised by the name ‘Light’, just as an archetype is revealed in its image.⁶⁷

The divine name of Light establishes the image of the Good among the ‘processions’ (πρόοδοι) outward of the divine essence. But if we look at the effects of the processions designated by the divine names, the

possibility of arriving at the knowledge of God, which cannot refer in any way to his essential nature, is offered instead through certain images and semblances of divine paradigms:

It might be more accurate to say that we cannot know God in his nature (ὅτι θεὸν γινώσκουμεν οὐκ ἐκ τῆς αὐτοῦ φύσεως), since this is unknowable and is beyond the reach of mind or of reason. But we know him from the arrangement of everything, because everything is, in a sense, projected out from him, and this order possesses certain images and semblances of his divine paradigms (εἰκόνας τινὰς καὶ ὁμοιώματα τῶν θείων αὐτοῦ παραδειγμάτων). We therefore approach that which is beyond all as far as our capacities allow us and we pass by way of the denial and the transcendence of all things and by way of the cause of all things. God is therefore known in all things and as distinct from all things.⁶⁸

The meaning of ‘divine paradigms’ should be sought in the notes on Wisdom that Pseudo-Dionysius provides in this same chapter, which is generally devoted to gnoseology. The ‘divine paradigms’ are the notions of all the things that God keeps in his Wisdom before bringing them to being. Therefore, it is creation in the ‘meontological’ state, that is, before God brings all things into being:

The divine Mind, therefore, takes in all things in a total knowledge which is transcendent. Because it is the Cause of all things it has a foreknowledge of everything. Before there are angels he has knowledge of angels and he brings them into being. He knows everything else and, if I may put it so, he knows them from the very beginning and therefore brings them into being.⁶⁹

Since Pseudo-Dionysius excludes the divine nature from the sphere of the knowledge that creatures can achieve of God, the archetype of a specific thing in God should be understood as a hypostasis in its absolute state, meontological and inert, that is, devoid of energies. These are given only when the archetypal hypostasis comes into being according to its own ontological species. The archetype is a formless image established in the divine Wisdom, in its pre-ontological state. It is only when coming into being that the image assume its form according to its species.

THE SOURCES OF PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS SYMBOLIC THEOLOGY: THE NEOPLATONIC SOURCES

We shall now consider Neoplatonic sources, whose importance for the formation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* is well known.⁷⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius drew a large number of references and borrowings, both conceptual, terminological, and methodological, from the Neoplatonic tradition. But before analysing the most relevant ones to our current subject, i.e. image theory, it is appropriate to assess the value of these sources in the overall plan of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* and its wider scope. In other words: it is possible to recognise a Neoplatonic agenda behind Pseudo-Dionysian philosophy? Or should they be understood as having a mere instrumental value? As I have argued elsewhere, the assumption of a crypto-pagan agenda in Pseudo-Dionysius finds no real justification in light of a rigorous, objective, and extensive examination of his writings.⁷¹ The fact that Pseudo-Dionysius adopted Neoplatonic terminology and concepts does not necessarily imply that he shared the ultimate purposes of Neoplatonic philosophy. Two roads can run parallel for a long distance but ultimately diverge radically when they turn to their respective destinations. Without doubt Pseudo-Dionysius looked to the philosophical culture of his time as well as to the education that he obtained at the Neoplatonic school of Athens. But he intended to elaborate a new interpretation of the main philosophical problems of his own time, with the intention of developing a philosophical reflection supporting a Christian vision of the world.

With reference to the main targets of Pseudo-Dionysian symbolic theology, in particular to the problem of the interpretation of symbols within the framework of scriptural exegesis, we observe that Pseudo-Dionysius faced, as the Cappadocian Fathers did before him, the problem of the epistemological status of symbols. Neoplatonic philosophers from Iamblichus onwards, possibly provoked by competition with Christianity,⁷² developed a philosophical exegesis of the myths of Hellenic religion, as earlier mentioned. They developed a theory of the symbol that is recognisable as the background of Pseudo-Dionysian symbolic theology. In particular, in Pseudo-Dionysius the dialectic of dissimilarity draws on that which had been developed by the school of Iamblichus as an intellectual and didactic tool aimed at overcoming the materialistic and obscene aspects of pagan mythological narratives and

representations. Lexical borrowings highlight how Pseudo-Dionysius confirm his dependence.⁷³ From the leading figures of the Neoplatonic School of Athens, namely Proclus and Syrianus, Pseudo-Dionysius took up the oxymoronic expression ‘dissimilar similarities’ (ἀνόμοιοι ὁμοιότητες).⁷⁴ Its epistemological significance, outlined in the second chapter of the *Celestial Hierarchy*, is central to the economy of his symbolic theology.

Pseudo-Dionysius’ *Ninth Letter* is one of the places where his symbolic theology finds a unitary exposition. I have elsewhere argued that within the *Corpus* this letter is contemporary with the development of the theory of hierarchy, and, consequently, with the writing of the *Hierarchies*.⁷⁵ The most relevant philosophical source for this letter is Proclus’ *Commentary on the Republic of Plato*. However, the way in which Pseudo-Dionysius draws on and adapts Proclus to his needs is symptomatic of how divergent his objectives are from those of Neoplatonic philosophy. In fact, although Pseudo-Dionysius adopts two important aspects of Proclus’ symbolic theory, such as the two modes of interaction with symbols and the distinction between the mimetic and the symbolic method,⁷⁶ an in-depth analysis of these themes confirms a marked distance between him and his source.

Let us start from the first point, namely the two modes of using symbols. While responding to the objections addressed by the Epicurean Colotes with regards to the use of myths and images in Plato, Proclus begins by emphasising the opinion of the ancients according to which ‘the intellect is identified with the faculty of imagination and that (...) there is no intellective process without images’,⁷⁷ adding that:

On the one hand, what is pure mythical fiction is appropriate only to those who live according to the faculty of imagination (φαντασίαν) and who do not have anything other than the passive intellect (παθητικὸς νοῦς). On the other hand, the refulgence of science, the capacity of intellective knowledge to reveal itself, is appropriate to those who have put all their activity into pure intellections (ἐν νοήσεσιν καθαράς).⁷⁸

Proclus contemplates the possibility that the two modes of interacting with symbols are based on a sort of ‘double intellect’, which is capable of including the ones as well as the others.⁷⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius in turn adopts the distinction between passive and pure reception, but he adopts a slightly different terminology:

And so the impassive (ἀπαθὲς) element of the soul is attuned to the simple and interior visions of those images (ἀγαλμάτων) which have the shape of the divine (θεοειδῶν). On the other hand the passive (παθητικόν) element of the soul, as befits its nature, honors and rises up toward the most divine of realities by way of the carefully combined elements of the figurative symbols (τυπωτικῶν συμβόλων).⁸⁰

As it is apparent, here Pseudo-Dionysius does not speak at all of a passive and a pure intellect, but of the passive and the impassive element of the soul. Moreover, he makes no reference to the imagination as a faculty that leads back to the passive intellect (νοῦς παθητικός), a concept that dates back to Aristotle's *De anima*.⁸¹ That Pseudo-Dionysius was aware of the Aristotelian origin of this concept is shown by the use he makes of the locution ἀπαθὲς τῆς ψυχῆς ('impassive part of the soul'), which occurs in the same passage of Aristotle in contrast to the passive intellect, and is not reported in the section of the treatise of Proclus which is the likely source of the Pseudo-Dionysian letter. Unlike Proclus, for whom imagination has an ambiguous meaning—negative since it is linked to materiality, but also positive and active with regard to its capability of unifying the contents of the senses⁸²—Pseudo-Dionysius believes imagination has a role that, if not negative, is nonetheless limited to the sphere of the sensible, associated as it is with material symbols or divisive fantasies, and lacking a role in the dynamics of anagogy.⁸³

With regards to the second point, namely Pseudo-Dionysius' reuse of the distinction Proclus draws between the mimetic and the symbolic methods, first it is necessary to consider the contexts within which the two authors apply them. According to Proclus the epistemological issue concerning symbols is related to the fact that they are adequate to the intelligible truth; consequently dissimilar symbols are more adequate than mimetic images to express the divine realities and to hide them from the profane.⁸⁴ In contrast, according to Pseudo-Dionysius the problem of 'the simple, marvellous, transcendent truth of the symbols'⁸⁵ has to be framed on the ground of the economy of Salvation. If the figures of truth described in the Old Testament can still be interpreted in light of Proclus' symbolic method, this is no longer suitable after the Incarnation and the establishment of a new order of symbols that imitate Jesus' divine-human operations, and that, in the context of the hierarchical celebrations of the sacraments, become a real—that is energetic—means of deification and anagogical ascent of human beings.⁸⁶

‘THE INEBRIATION OF GOD.’ BEYOND THE CURTAIN
OF SYMBOLS AND SACRAMENTAL PARTICIPATION
IN THE DIVINE MYSTERIES

The reasons why Pseudo-Dionysius distances himself from his Neoplatonic source emerges clearly in the remaining part of the *Ninth Letter*. Here the path of the interpretation of the symbols arrives at the ‘solid and liquid nourishment of Wisdom’ symbolised by the wine-mixing bowl (κρατήρ), behind which we may perceive a clear allusion to the Eucharistic chalice. This is further confirmed by the following reference to ‘the banquet of the saints in the kingdom of God’.⁸⁷ The outcome of this banquet is the ‘inebriation’ of God, which symbolises his transcendence beyond the intellect:

Taking holy delight according to this same sacred explication, one says of God, the cause of all good, that he is ‘inebriated’,⁸⁸ and this is to convey that superabundance of delights unfathomable to the mind. Better still, it is to convey the quite total and indescribable limitlessness of God’s well-being. (...) As for being out of one’s mind and wits, which follows drunkenness, in God’s case it must be taken to mean that incomprehensible superabundance of God by virtue of which his capacity to understand transcends any understanding or any state of being understood.⁸⁹

The road of the symbols thus reaches its end and symbolic theology gives way to the dimension of mystery. Once the understanding of the symbols of God’s ‘inebriation’ and ‘sleep’ has been attained, it is necessary to move on to other divine symbols:

The sleep of God refers to the divine transcendence and to his incommunicability to those for whom he providentially cares. His wakefulness refers to the care he takes to provide for the education and the salvation of those who need him. After I have shown this to you, you will then be able to move on to other theological symbols.⁹⁰

The following lines, which conclude the *Ninth Letter* and ideally the whole course of Pseudo-Dionysian symbolic theology, bring back to mind vividly what the author suggested at the beginning of the same letter, to get rid of childish images, that is, the exterior appearance of symbols by which the truth is hidden, and to elevate the mind to ‘the simple, marvellous, transcendent truth of the symbols’:

Only these real lovers of holiness know how to disencumber themselves of the workings of childish imagination regarding the sacred symbols. They alone have the simplicity of mind and the receptive, contemplative power to cross over to the simple, marvelous, transcendent truth of the symbols.⁹¹

The path of symbols leads to mysteries, that is, to the sacraments.⁹² Finally, the sacramental, ecclesial, and eschatological context that marks the end of the journey is clarified by the reference to Jesus distributing the divine award to the righteous at the eternal banquet:

We must think of the leading to the table as the rest from numerous labors, as a life without toil, as a commerce with God in light and in the land of the living, as a fullness of sacred joy, as the unstinted supply of everything blessed and good by means of which one is replete with happiness. It is Jesus himself who gladdens them and leads them to the table, who serves them, who grants them everlasting rest, who bestows and pours out on them the fullness of good and beautiful things.⁹³

According to the gnoseological viewpoint, the pre-eminence of the symbolic and dissimilar over the iconic and mimetic is better suited to apophatic theology, whose culmination is *agnosia*, that is ‘unknowing.’ On the other hand, following the hierarchical and ecclesial perspective, things are reversed, and the iconic significance prevails over the symbolic. The ascensional movement that brings Moses to unknowing, which Dionysius described in the first chapter of the *Mystical Theology*, is surpassed by the *koinonic*, that is the communion, dimension embodied by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This finds in sacramental life the possibility to participate in the Trinitarian mysteries as a personal relationship to the divine-human energies of the Incarnate Word. It should be kept in mind that even dissimilar symbols are ultimately inadequate to represent the absolute transcendence of God with respect to his creatures:

Scripture itself asserts that God is dissimilar and that he is not to be compared with anything, that he is different from everything and, stranger yet, that there is none at all like him. Nevertheless words of this sort do not contradict the similarity of things to him, for the very same things are both similar and dissimilar to God. They are similar to him to the extent that they imitate, as far as possible, what cannot be imitated. They are dissimilar

to him in that as effects they fall so very far short of their Cause and are infinitely and incomparably subordinate to him.⁹⁴

This gnoseological impasse can be overcome only by addressing the revelation of knowledge by the divine Wisdom and the transmission of the divine energies through the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies. In this sense, the gap between the levels of being is overcome by the divine Wisdom which embraces every reality: 'the name of Wisdom extends to all intellectual, rational and sensitive things, and is beyond all these'.⁹⁵

THE LEGACY OF PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS AND THE CLASH OF PARADIGMS

As we have seen, Dionysius' image theory relied on the theoretical and dogmatic framework outlined by the Cappadocian Fathers and further enhanced by the Council of Chalcedon. It was characterised by a *koinonic* and liturgical imprint. However, the effects of the paradigm shift provoked by the Cappadocians with regard to the conception of the image fully emerged only later, towards the end of the seventh century, when iconic thought and *iconophilia*, that is a favourable attitude towards sacred images and the visual in general, began to take on definite traits.⁹⁶ To the developments of Byzantine *iconophilia* in the theological and devotional culture of Byzantium, Pseudo-Dionysius contributed by making the sacred image theologically acceptable. This was possible by presenting it as a hierarchical symbol, in which the union of similar and dissimilar functions as the channel through which the transmission of divine gifts from above is enabled, according to the law of hierarchical transmission; this does not imply an arbitrary and idolatrous elevation of the sensible form to the status of model or archetype.⁹⁷

The application of these theories to visual arts is not discussed by the Cappadocian Fathers or by Pseudo-Dionysius. All the same, the special link that Pseudo-Dionysius drew between image and hypostasis, the implications of his discourse on deification, and his understanding of the role of natures and hypostasis in the Incarnation (following the Council of Chalcedon) exerted a lasting influence on the Christian aesthetic thought and visual thinking concerning the divine and the sacred.

We can say that the concept of image elaborated by the Cappadocians was systematised by Pseudo-Dionysius: a first evidence of his translation of their iconic theory into practice is to be found in the *Ecclesiastical*

Hierarchy, where the description of the rites is followed by a symbolical interpretation (*theōría*) aimed at disclosing their spiritual sense.⁹⁸ Here the iconic impact of the liturgy is not only what is profiled in the imagination of the reader, but rather what takes place before the eyes of those who participate in the rites:

The heavenly beings, because of their intelligence, have their own permitted conceptions of God. For us, on the other hand, it is by way of the perceptible images that we are uplifted as far as we can be to the contemplation of what is divine.⁹⁹

On the basis of this premise, the whole treatise is interwoven with references to the visual experience of the participants in the celebration of the sacraments. The reference to the vision appears several times in the description of the rites, and although Pseudo-Dionysius particularly refers to the ‘eyes of the intellect’, according to him intellection arises from the sensible and mimetic vision of the performance of the rites. For instance, concerning the liturgical veils that cover the chalice containing the ingredients destined to be consecrated as Holy Myron, and which symbolise the seraphim, he affirms:

The incorporeal characteristics of the seraphim are described by Holy Scripture in perceptible imagery which reverently reveals their intelligible reality and I think I have described these sufficiently in my discussion of the ranks of transcendent hierarchies. I think I made them sufficiently clear to the eyes of your mind. And yet since those sacredly standing around the hierarch present us now with a likeness of this supreme order let us look with unworldly eyes once more upon their most godlike splendor.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, the celebrants of the rite are metaphorically described as ‘divine painters’ (θεῖοι γραφεῖς),¹⁰¹ since they transpose the models they contemplate with the intellect into mental figures, as the painters look at the sensible model of what they want to paint:

In the domain of perceptible images, the artist keeps an eye constantly on the original and never allows himself to be sidetracked or to have his attention divided by any other visible object. If he does this, then one may presume to say that whatever the object which he wishes to depict he will, so to speak, produce a second one, so that one entity can be taken for the other, though in essence they are actually different. It is thus with those

artists who love beauty in the mind. They make an image of it within their minds. The concentration and the persistence of their contemplation of this fragrant, secret beauty enables them to produce an exact likeness of God. And so these divine artists never cease to shape the power of their minds along the lines of a loveliness which is conceptual, transcendent, and fragrant, and if they practice the virtues called for by imitation of God it is not ‘to be seen by men,’¹⁰² as scripture puts it.¹⁰³

We may assume also that mental images are the model-forms of liturgical gestures and imagery. By describing the vivifying action of the energies that takes place within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, Pseudo-Dionysius opens a window on the mystical dimension of the rites, in which theurgy (God’s providential acts) and synergy are shown in action, with the aim of deifying the members of the hierarchy. Being the action of divine energies that involves all of the spiritual and physical senses of their celebrants and participants, liturgy is then presented as the receptacle of the anagogical guidance (χειραγωγή) that is the purpose of the images-symbols according the Cappadocian-Dionysian perspective. It was likely within the context of the hierarchical and deifying liturgy described by Pseudo-Dionysius that sacred images were liturgised, becoming a requisite element of the hierarchical and liturgical deifying system.¹⁰⁴

In light of the above, we have managed to identify certain points of the Cappadocian–Dionysian image theory that exerted a long-lasting influence thought on the Christian view of ‘images’. I posit that from the incorporation of the image into the liturgy the cult of icons began to take shape. It is not by mere coincidence that the reports of abuse, or better misuse of icons consisted in their liturgical misuse, such as choosing them as godparents at baptism, or adding paint scraped from icons to the Eucharistic chalice, or again taking the Eucharist above an icon as if to receive it from the saint’s hand.¹⁰⁵ Behind such misuses we can observe a materialistic and extremising interpretation of the energetic-hypostatic relationship identified as one of the basic elements of the Cappadocian and Pseudo-Dionysian image theory. The communication of energies between hypostases through the hypostatic image was interpreted to the letter as a transfer of vital energies.¹⁰⁶ The icon came to be seen as a living being and consequently fell into the category of idols—a category from which the Fathers sought very hard to dissociate it.¹⁰⁷

I therefore argue that the controversy over sacred images can be explained as a consequence of the lack of awareness, among many

participants in Byzantine culture, of the paradigm shift brought about by Cappadocian and Pseudo-Dionysian image theory in the sixth and seventh centuries. The change effected by the assimilation of this image theory was actually profound and far-reaching, like the hidden maturation of a caterpillar into a chrysalis from which a butterfly emerges thoroughly transformed. By the mid- to late seventh century, imbued with the lesson of the Cappadocian Fathers and Pseudo-Dionysius, art expressed the hypostatic and energetic foundations of the Christian faith, not only as abstract concepts. Art, in fact, stimulated encounters of gazes, vitality of forms, *koinonía* of energies, relationships of hypostases, and a deifying participation in the divine life.

We might hypothesise that the image controversy broke out because the opponents of veneration of sacred images failed to recognise the theological rationale for this liturgical and devotional practice, as it was established on the basis of the teachings of the Cappadocian Fathers and Pseudo-Dionysius. This spurred a dispute that contrasted the new paradigm with the old one, whose theory of the image was still based on the relationship between natures and on the principle of the ontological degradation between the prototype and its copy. The latter was a return to an unconscious Platonism that always lurked in Christian culture, mounting in many cases—and Byzantine Iconoclasm is a crucial example—a serious challenge to the genuine theological and spiritual objectives of the ecclesiastical tradition, such as Pseudo-Dionysius strove to establish as the basis for his reflection on images.¹⁰⁸

NOTES

1. Mainoldi (2018a, 358ff.).
2. Ibid., 477–8.
3. Ibid., 479–80.
4. Kitzinger (1954), Barber (2002), and Elsner (2012).
5. For instance, we can quote the examples provided by Basil the Great in his treatise *On the Holy Spirit* referring to portraits and other images, or the metaphor of the ‘divine painters’ in *EH* III. About this issue in Gregory of Nyssa, see Iozzia (2015, 37, 50).
6. Kitzinger (1954, 138) and Parry (1996, 36).
7. What has mostly attracted the attention of Pseudo-Dionysian scholars is the fact that Hypatius is the first known author to question the authenticity of the *Corpus*, during the debate between anti- and pro-Chalcedonians which was convened by Justinian in Constantinople in 532.

- I argue that Hypatius' appropriation of Pseudo-Dionysian *eikonic* language in his letter to Julian without any reference to the authority of 'Dionysius' shows two things: first, that the doubts about the identity of the author persisted in Hypatius' mind; second, that he had assimilated something of Pseudo-Dionysius' thought and terminology. For the debate on Hypatius' position with regard to the *CD*, see Mainoldi (2018a, 61–7).
8. Mainoldi (2017c, 437–40).
 9. On the dating of this icon in the time of Justinian, see Conostas (2014, 47).
 10. Conostas (2014, 69, 84).
 11. See Runciman (1931, 244, 252) and Palmer and Rodley (1988, 128–9).
 12. For a review of the *CD*'s early dissemination and influence, see Mainoldi (2018a, 56–96).
 13. Mainoldi (2018a, 452–3). Pseudo-Dionysius makes seven references to this work.
 14. See *CH* I.3:121C; 8. For the symbolic interpretation of the senses, see *CH* XV.3:332A–B. However, given the distinction between the general conception of the symbol and visual image as a particular category of symbols, Pseudo-Dionysius uses symbol and image interchangeably; for instance, in *Ep.* IX.1:1104B; 193, 4; *CH* XV.9:340B; 59, 9. On this topic, see Chapter 2 by Angelo Tavoraro in this volume.
 15. See Ivanovic's essay in this same volume (Chapter 6).
 16. *EH* I.5:377A; 68, 1–4; Luijheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 199) (amended): ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ συμβολικὴ τίς ἐστὶν ὅπερ ἔφην ἀναλόγως ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς ἢ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἱεραρχία δεομένη τῶν αἰσθητῶν εἰς τὴν ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὰ νοητὰ θειοτέραν ἡμῶν ἀναγωγὴν.
 17. On Pseudo-Dionysian project to overcome, through mystical theology and hierarchical sacramentality, the Origenistic-Evagrian theological trend that postulated the deification of the intellect, see Fiori (2017, passim).
 18. *Ep.* IX.1:1105D; 197, 10–12; Luijheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 283) (amended): τὴν μὲν ἀπόρητον καὶ μυστικὴν, τὴν δὲ ἐμφανῆ καὶ γνωριμωτέραν, καὶ τὴν μὲν συμβολικὴν καὶ τελεστικὴν, τὴν δὲ φιλόσοφον καὶ ἀποδεικτικὴν. See below, at note 91.
 19. *Ep.* IX.2:1108D–1109A; 200, 9–12; Luijheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 285): Καὶ μὴ ὥς ἔτυχε τὰ ἱερὰ σύμβολα συμφύρειν, ἀλλὰ προσηκόντως αὐτὰ ταῖς αἰτίαις ἢ ταῖς ὑπάρξεσιν ἢ ταῖς δυνάμεσιν ἢ ταῖς τάξεσιν ἢ ταῖς ἀξίαις ἀναπτύσσειν, ὧν καὶ ἔστιν ἐκφαντορικὰ συνθήματα.
 20. For example, *CH* II.2:140B; *EH* I.4:376C; *Ep.* IX.1:1105C. See also Chapter 6 in this volume by Vladimir Ivanovici on the *polloí*.

21. Mainoldi (2018a, 366–7).
22. Simonetti (1981, 54).
23. Moerschini (2008, 394ff.).
24. Ibid., 354–5.
25. Ibid., 357–9.
26. Simonetti (1981, 45–6, 65; 2004, 806–7).
27. Leontius of Byzantium, *Liber Tres contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, PG 86a, 1365Aff = Leontius of Byzantium, *Deprehensio et Triumphus super Nestorianos*, Daley (ed.) (2017: 420ff.).
28. Acts of Constantinople II, Conte (ed.) (2006, 184–5) and Simonetti (2004, 807).
29. *EH* III.iii.4:429C; 83. Pseudo-Dionysius inserts these crucial remarks regarding the canon of the two Testaments in a section devoted to the rite of the Synaxis, speaking about the readings of the Eucharistic Liturgy.
30. *EH* III.iii.5:432B: 84, 19: ἐν εἰκόσι [...] ἔγραψεν.
31. It is perhaps with the purpose of distinguishing the theory of scriptural symbols from the general theory of the image that Pseudo-Dionysius coined the neologism ἱερογραφία; see Mainoldi (2018a, 367–8).
32. Simonetti (1981, 45–6).
33. Bornert (1966, 58–60).
34. Russell (2004, 143–4).
35. Fiori (2017, 212–4).
36. Mainoldi (2018a, 240–57).
37. On the dual mode of transmission, immediate and mediated, of the thearchic gifts, see Mainoldi (2017a, 202–5).
38. Mainoldi (2015, passim) and Mainoldi (2018a, 200n, 229, 246, 251, 252n, 420, 434–46) with references to the Pseudo-Dionysian literature.
39. On the theophanic role of the visible things according to Pseudo-Dionysius, see Louth (2005, 16, 19).
40. *CHI*.3:121C–D; 8, 14–21; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.), 146.
41. Basil the Great, *On the Hexameron*, Giet (ed.) (1968, I, 6); trans. in Basil, *Letters and Select Works*, Schaff (trans.) (2004, 258): ‘You will finally discover that the world was not conceived by chance and without reason, but for an useful end and for the great advantage of all beings, since it is really the school where reasonable souls exercise themselves, the training ground where they learn to know God; since by the sight of visible and sensible things the mind is led, as by a hand, to the contemplation of invisible things (διὰ τῶν ὁραμένων καὶ αἰσθητῶν χειραγωγίαν τῷ νῷ παρεχόμενος πρὸς τὴν θεωρίαν τῶν ἀοράτων)’; Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, Jaeger (ed.) (1960, I, 39:295, 4): ‘In our subdivision of all the beings we have noticed these differences: first comes what is related to our understanding (I mean the sensible element) and then what is examined by the intellect through the guidance

- of sensible realities (τὸ διὰ τῆς τῶν αἰσθητῶν χειραγωγίας ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦ θεωρούμενον), which is what we call the intelligible (νοητόν)'. For the still prevailing rhetorical significance of the references to visual images made by the fourth-century Fathers, see Louth (2005, 17).
42. Elsewhere I have proposed that the choice of Pseudo-Dionysius to follow the Cappadocian model was first of all an endorsement of the dogmatic doctrine defined by the first three ecumenical councils, and second, an endorsement of a wider theological-political project aimed at promoting the emerging role of Constantinople as the ecumenical seat of Orthodoxy, against the rival sees of Alexandria and Antioch. The choice of Pseudo-Dionysius was motivated by the connection established by the three Cappadocian Fathers with the Church of Constantinople, especially through their major role, directly or indirectly, in the Second Ecumenical Council, held in Constantinople in 381 (Gregory of Nazianzus even served for a time as bishop of Constantinople). At the same time, by means of the pseudo-epigraphic authorship, Pseudo-Dionysius was suggesting that Cappadocian theology had a notable precursor in Dionysius the Areopagite, the Athenian disciple of St Paul; see Mainoldi (2015, 14; 2018a, 276–84).
 43. Ladner (1953, 4–5, 12) and Schönborn (1986, 30–53).
 44. Gn 1:26: καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός Ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν.
 45. 2 Cor 4:4: ὃς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ, and Col 1:15: ὃς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου.
 46. *Lingua* (2006, 67–71).
 47. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, Pruche (ed.), 406: διότι ἡ [δοξολογία] τῆς εἰκόνης τιμὴ ἐπὶ τὸ πρωτότυπον διαβαίνει. Ὁ οὖν ἐστὶν ἐνταῦθα μιμητικῶς ἡ εἰκὼν, τοῦτο ἐκεῖ φυσικῶς ὁ Υἱός.
 48. Bradshaw (2013, 15); for Gregory of Nyssa's aesthetic reflection and its connection with Neoplatonism, see Iozzia (2015, 33–7). See also Parry (1996, 23–33).
 49. The Cappadocians came to these conclusions by recognising that the origin of the Holy Trinity is not the divine essence, but the person–hypostasis of the Father. On the various facets of the Cappadocian ontological revolution and its Pseudo-Dionysian reception, see Mainoldi (2015).
 50. The richness of the iconic thought of the Cappadocians has been widely illustrated by Vasiliu (2010). In this dense study also the paradigm shift provoked by the three Fathers and the transfer of the concept of *eikōn* to the visible identity of the person—both divine-human and human—is well underlined; see *ibid.*, 155–77.
 51. On patristic sophiology, see Hainthaler et al. (2017).

52. This principle reflects the solution to the problem of universals known as immanent realism, which generally characterises eastern patristic ontology; see Erismann (2010, 2011).
53. See *DN* XI, 6; Ladner (1953, 9) and Mainoldi (2017b).
54. Larchet (2010, 145ff.).
55. Tollefsen (2012, *passim*).
56. According to Pseudo-Dionysius, immanence and transcendence are connected to the two ways of theology, that is the cataphatic and apophatic one. Even if in this regard he was similarly indebted to the Cappadocians, he drew this pair of concepts from the Neoplatonists; see Louth (2005, 21–2) and Mainoldi (2017d, 84).
57. See *Gn* 1:26.
58. *DN* IX.6:913C; 211, 13–12, 8; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 117–8) (amended).
59. On the concept of energy in Byzantine aesthetical thought, see also Mainoldi (2018b, 21ff.).
60. Mainoldi (2018a, 477).
61. Lampe (1961, 457–8).
62. *DN* II.8:645C; 132, 14–17; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 64) (amended).
63. *CH* IV.2:180A; 21, 3–5; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 156) (amended).
64. *CH* VIII.1:237B; 32, 16–17 and 237C, 33, 4–6; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 166–7) (amended).
65. Mainoldi (2017d, 89).
66. *DN* II.10:648C; 134, 7.12–14: Ἡ πάντων αἰτία καὶ ἀποπληρωτικὴ τοῦ υἱοῦ θεότης. (...) εἶδος εἰδοποιὸν ἐν τοῖς ἀνειδέοις ὡς εἰδεάρχης, ἀνειδέος ἐν τοῖς εἶδεσιν ὡς ὑπὲρ εἶδος, οὐσία ταῖς ὅλαις οὐσίαις ἀχράντως ἐπιβατεύουσα καὶ ὑπερουσίως ἀπάσης οὐσίας ἐξηρημένη. Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 65–6) (amended).
67. *DN* IV.4:697C; 147, 2–4; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 74): Ἐκ τάγαθοῦ γὰρ τὸ φῶς καὶ εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος. Διὸ καὶ φωτωνυμικῶς ὑμνεῖται τάγαθὸν ὡς ἐν εἰκόνι τὸ ἀρχέτυπον ἐκφαινόμενον.
68. *DN* VII.3:869C–872A; 197, 18–198, 2; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 108): Μήποτε οὖν ἀληθὲς εἰπεῖν, ὅτι θεὸν γινώσκομεν οὐκ ἐκ τῆς αὐτοῦ φύσεως, ἄγνωστον γὰρ τοῦτο καὶ πάντα λόγον καὶ νοῦν ὑπεραῖρον, ἀλλ’ ἐκ τῆς πάντων τῶν ὄντων διατάξεως ὡς ἐξ αὐτοῦ προβεβλημένης καὶ εἰκόνας τινὰς καὶ ὁμοιώματα τῶν θείων αὐτοῦ παραδειγμάτων ἐχούσης εἰς τὸ ἐπέκεινα πάντων ὁδῶ καὶ τάξει κατὰ δύναμιν ἄνιμεν ἐν τῇ πάντων ἀφαίρεσει καὶ ὑπεροχῇ καὶ ἐν τῇ πάντων αἰτίᾳ.
69. *DN* VII.2:869A; 196, 12–16; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 107): Ὡστε ὁ θεὸς νοῦς πάντα συνέχει τῇ πάντων ἐξηρημένη γνώσει κατὰ

τὴν πάντων αἰτίαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὴν πάντων εἰδήσιν προειληφώς, πρὶν ἀγγέλους γενέσθαι εἰδώς καὶ παράγων ἀγγέλους καὶ πάντα τὰ ἄλλα ἐνδοθεν καὶ ἀπ’ αὐτῆς, ἢν’ οὕτως εἶπω, τῆς ἀρχῆς εἰδώς καὶ εἰς οὐσίαν ἄγων.

70. The references related to this topic are countless, for a historiographical review, see Mainoldi (2018a, 103–13).
71. Mainoldi (2018a, 422–49) and Mainoldi (2017a).
72. Beatrice (1997) and Mitchell and Van Nuffelen (2010, 1–13).
73. For a detailed analysis of the lexical and textual parallelisms, see Petroff (2012).
74. Syrianus, *In Aristotelis metaphysica commentaria*, Kroll (ed.), 152, 23; Proclus, *In Platonis rem publicam commentarii*, Kroll (ed.), vol. 2: 232, 6; Proclus, *Theologia Platonica*, Saffrey and Westerink (eds.), vol. I: 57, 20. The expression ‘dissimilar symbols’ is often recurring within the Pseudo-Dionysian historiographical vulgate, but this very locution never appears in the *CD*; on the other hand we find ἀνόμοιους ἱεροπλαστία in *CH* II.5:145A; 16, 1.
75. Mainoldi (2018a, 477).
76. See respectively Petroff (2012, 34, 37–9), and Chapter 2 by Angelo Tavolaro in this same volume.
77. Proclus, *In Platonis rem publicam commentarii*, Kroll (ed.), vol. II: 107, 17–20: ὥστε καὶ τῶν παλαιῶν τινὰς τοὺς μὲν φαντασίαν ταῦτόν εἶπειν εἶναι καὶ νοῦν, τοὺς δὲ καὶ διακρίναντας ἀφάνταστον νόησιν μηδεμίαν ἀπολείπειν.
78. *Ibid.*, 107, 26–108, 1: τὸ μὲν γὰρ μυθῶδες πᾶν ὅσον πέπλασται μόνον τοῖς κατὰ μόνην τὴν φαντασίαν ζῶσιν ἐστὶν οἰκεῖον καὶ ὧν ἐστὶν τὸ ὅλον ὁ παθητικὸς νοῦς, τὸ δὲ φανὸν τῆς ἐπιστήμης καὶ αὐτοφανὲς τῆς νοερᾶς <γνώσεως> τοῖς ἰδρύσασιν ἐν νοήσεσιν καθαφαῖς τὴν ἑαυτῶν ὄλην ἐνέργειαν.
79. *Ibid.*, 108, 4 and 7: διττὸν ἔχουσι νοῦν (...) ὁ διττὸς ἐν ἡμῖν νοῦς.
80. *Ep.* IX.1:1108A–B; 198, 8–11; Luiibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 284) (amended): τὸ μὲν ἀπαθὲς τῆς ψυχῆς εἰς τὰ ἀπλᾶ καὶ ἐνδότατα τῶν θεοειδῶν ἀγαλμάτων ἀφορίσαι θεάματα, τὸ δὲ παθητικὸν αὐτῆς συμφυῶς θεραπεύειν ἅμα καὶ ἀνατείνειν ἐπὶ τὰ θειότατα τοῖς προεμμηχανημένοις τῶν τυπωτικῶν συμβόλων ἀναπλασμοῖς.
81. Aristotle, *De anima*, Ross (ed.), 430A, 25.
82. Moutsopoulos (1985, 254–3).
83. *CH* VII.2:208B; 28, 25; *CH* XV.9:340B; 59, 7; *EH* VI.ii.533B; 117, 8. In *DN* IV.6:701B; 150, 12, the unifying function is attributed to the divine name of the intellectual Light (Φῶς νοητόν). This passage highlights also the contrast between ἀγάλματα and σύμβολα. Their respective targeting the impassive part of the soul, the first, and to the passive part, the second, provides the insight that the former are inner images,

which are not impressed into materiality or sensations, while the latter are sensible images.

84. Cardullo (1985, 151–2, 225–7).
85. *Ep.* IX.1:1105C; 197, 7–8; Luiibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 283); see below, at note 91.
86. On symbolism and mimesis between the two hierarchical Pseudo-Dionysian treatises, see also Tavolaro's essay in the present volume.
87. *Ep.* IX.5:1112D; 205, 8–9; Luiibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 287) (amended): τὰ ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν ὁσίων συμπόσια.
88. See Ps 77:65.
89. *Ep.* IX.5:1112B–C; 204, 8–11 and 205, 1–4; Luiibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 287): Κατὰ ταύτην δὲ τὴν ἱερὰν τῆς εὐωχίας ἀνάπτυξιν καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ πάντων ἀγαθῶν αἴτιος θεὸς μεθύειν λέγεται διὰ τὴν ὑπερπλήρη καὶ ὑπὲρ νόησιν τῆς εὐωχίας ἥ, κυριώτερον εἰπεῖν, εὐεξίας τοῦ θεοῦ παντελεῖ καὶ ἄφατον ἀμετρίαν (...) Ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ἐπακολουθοῦσαν τῇ μέθῃ τοῦ φρονεῖν ἔκστασιν τὴν ὑπεροχὴν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ὑπὲρ νόησιν οἰητέον, καθ' ἣν ἐξήρηται τοῦ νοεῖν ὑπὲρ τὸ νοεῖν ὧν καὶ ὑπὲρ τὸ νοεῖσθαι.
90. *Ep.* IX.6:1113B; 206, 8–12; Luiibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 288) (amended): καὶ ὅταν φῶμεν θεῖον μὲν ὕπνον εἶναι τὸ ἐξηρημένον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἀκοινώνητον ἀπὸ τῶν προνοουμένων, ἐργήγορσιν δὲ τὴν εἰς τὸ προνοεῖν αὐτοῦ τῶν παιδείας ἢ σωτηρίας δεομένων προσοχὴν, ἐπ' ἄλλα θεολογικὰ σύμβολα μετελεύσῃ.
91. *Ep.* IX.1:1105C; 197, 3–8; Luiibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 283) (amended): μόνους δὲ ἀνακαλύπτεσθαι τοῖς τῆς θεότητος γνησίοις ἐρασταῖς, ὡς πᾶσαν τὴν παιδαριώδη φαντασίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἱερῶν συμβόλων ἀποσκευαζομένοις καὶ ἱκανοῖς διαβαίνειν ἀπλότητι νοῦ καὶ θεωρητικῆς δυνάμεως ἐπιτηδειότητι πρὸς τὴν ἀπλὴν καὶ ὑπερφυῖ καὶ ὑπεριδρυμένην τῶν συμβόλων ἀλήθειαν. See above, at note 85.
92. See above, at note 18.
93. *Ep.* IX.5:1112B–1113A; 206, 1–7; Luiibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 288): Καὶ τὴν ἀνάγκισιν ἀνάπαυλαν οἰόμεθα τῶν πολλῶν πόνων καὶ ζώῃν ἀπήμονα καὶ πολιτείαν ἔνθεον ἐν φωτὶ καὶ χάρᾳ ζώντων, ἀπάσης εὐπαθείας ἱερᾶς ἀναπεπλησμένην καὶ παντοδαπῶν καὶ μακαρίων ἀγαθῶν ἄφθονον χορηγίαν, καθ' ἣν εὐφροσύνης ἀπάσης ἀναπύμπλυνται, τοῦτου δὴ τοῦ εὐφραίνειν Ἰησοῦ καὶ ἀνακλίνοντος αὐτοῦς καὶ διακονοῦντος καὶ τὴν αἰωνίαν ἀνάπαυλαν δωρουμένου καὶ τὴν ἀποπλήρωσιν τῶν καλῶν διανέμοντος ἅμα καὶ ἐπιρρέοντος.
94. *DN* IX.7:916A; 212, 9–15; Luiibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 118) (amended): ἡ θεολογία τὸ ἀνόμοιον αὐτὸν εἶναι πρεσβεύει καὶ τοῖς πᾶσιν ἀσύντακτον ὡς πάντων ἕτερον καὶ τὸ δὴ παραδοξότερον, ὅτι μὴδὲ εἶναι τι ὅμοιον αὐτῷ φησιν. Καίτοι οὐκ ἐναντίος ὁ λόγος τῇ

- πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁμοιότητα. Τὰ γὰρ αὐτὰ καὶ ὅμοια θεῶ καὶ ἀνόμοια, τὸ μὲν κατὰ τὴν ἐνδεχομένην τοῦ ἀμιμήτου μίμησιν, τὸ δὲ κατὰ τὸ ἀποδόον τῶν αἰτιατῶν τοῦ αἰτίου καὶ μέτροις ἀπείροις καὶ ἀσυγκρίτοις ἀπολειπόμενον.
95. *DN* V.1.816B; 181, 5–6: Ἡ δὲ τῆς σοφίας εἰς πάντα τὰ νοερά καὶ λογικά καὶ αἰσθητικά ἐκτείνεται καὶ ὑπὲρ πάντα ταῦτα ἔστιν.
96. Brubaker (2012, 13).
97. On idolatry and iconology, see Vasiliu (2010, 145–51) and *Lingua* (2006, *passim*).
98. On *EH*'s structure, see Mainoldi (2016b, 101–2; 2018a, 293–5).
99. *EH* I.ii:373B; 65, 13–15; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 197): Αἱ μὲν ὡς νόες νοοῦσι κατὰ τὸ αὐταῖς θεμιτόν, ἡμεῖς δὲ αἰσθηταῖς εἰκόσιν ἐπὶ τὰς θείας ὡς δυνατὸν ἀναγόμεθα θεωρίας.
100. *EH* IV.vi:480D; 100, 6–12: Τὰς μὲν οὖν ἀσωμάτους τῶν Σεραφίμ ἰδιότητος ἐν τοῖς λογίοις αἰσθηταῖς εἰκόσι τῶν νοητῶν ἐκφαντορικαῖς ἱερῶς ἀναγεγραμμένας ἐν τοῖς διακόσμοις τῶν ὑπερουρανίων ἱεραρχιῶν ὡς οἶμαι καλῶς ἐθεασάμεθα καὶ τοῖς σοῖς νοεροῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ὑπεδείξαμεν. Ὅμως, ἐπειδὴ [καὶ νῦν] οἱ τὸν ἱεράρχην ἱερῶς περιεστῶτες αὐτὴν ἡμῖν ἐκείνην ἀποτυποῦσι τὴν ὑπερτάτην διακόσμησιν, ἐν ἐπιτομῇ καὶ νῦν ἀλλοτρίαις ὄψεσι τὴν θεοειδεστάτην αὐτῶν ἀγλαΐαν ὀψόμεθα. And again in *EH* IV,10:484B; 102, 11, is said that the ritual gesture ‘brings to the contemplative eyes’ (ἄγει τοῖς θεωρητικοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς, our trans., since the reference to the ‘eyes’ is here omitted by Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) [1987, 231]).
101. *EH* IV.iii.1:473C; 96, 12.
102. Mt 23:5; see Mt 6:1–5.
103. *EH* IV.iii.1:473C; 96, 5–14; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 225–6): Καὶ καθάπερ ἐπὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν εἰκόνων εἰ πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον εἶδος ὁ γραφεὺς ἀκλινῶς εἰσορᾷ πρὸς μηδὲν ἄλλο τῶν ὁρατῶν ἀνθελκόμενος ἢ κατὰ τι μεριζόμενος αὐτὸν ἐκείνον ὅστις ἐστὶ τὸν γραφόμενον εἰ θέμις εἰπεῖν διπλασιασέει καὶ δείξει τὸν ἐκάτερον ἐν ἐκατέρῳ παρὰ τὸ τῆς οὐσίας διάφορον, οὕτω τοῖς φιλοκάλοις ἐν νῶ γραφεῦσιν ἢ πρὸς τὸ εὐῶδες καὶ κρύφιον κάλλος ἀτενῆς καὶ ἀπαρέγκλιτος θεωρία τὸ ἀπλανὲς δωρήσεται καὶ θεοειδέστατον ἰνδαλμα. Εἰκότως οὖν πρὸς τὴν ὑπερουσίως εὐῶδη καὶ νοητὴν εὐπρέπειαν οἱ θεῖοι γραφεῖς τὸ νοερὸν ἑαυτῶν ἀμεταστρέπτως εἰδοποιοῦντες οὐδεμίαν δρῶσι τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς θεομιμήτων ἀρετῶν “Εἰς τὸ θεαθῆναι” κατὰ τὸ λόγιον “τοῖς ἀνθρώποις”.
104. The penetration of Pseudo-Dionysius’ language into the Byzantine liturgical tradition is attested by its unequivocally Pseudo-Dionysian textual borrowings and gestural symbolism; see Scazzoso (1965, 1967). On the transformation of visual imagery during the sixth century and the role Pseudo-Dionysius played in it, see also Louth (2005, 25).

105. Schmemmann (1977, 204).
106. For the orthodox understanding, see above, p. 12, 13; it should be noted that the cult of saints in their bodily relics played a role behind the cult of hypostatic vicarious action through the icons, see Brubaker (2012, 10–11).
107. Lingua (2006, 43ff.).
108. On Byzantine Iconoclasm and Platonism, see Parry (1996, 27); on Iconoclasm as pseudomorphism, see Mainoldi (2018b, 25–7).

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Eikon *and* Symbolon in the Corpus Dionysiacum: *Scriptures and Sacraments* *as Aesthetic Categories*

Angelo Tavolaro

The role of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* as one of the main sources for medieval arts has been widely discussed.¹ Widespread from the Far East to the Latin West, its legacy has especially concerned the visual arts, and particularly painting and architecture. This can be ascribed to the Pseudo-Dionysian lexicon, of which one of the main features was the adoption of terms which shaped, in ancient times, the vocabulary to describe the beauty of creation.² Beauty as a transcendent quality of God is in fact a central topic in Christian theology.³ Although many authors engaged with his writings, the aesthetic aspects of Pseudo-Dionysian thought were not focal in the theological debate until the iconoclastic controversy between the eighth and the ninth centuries.⁴ However, leaving aside later interpretations, the whole *Corpus*—but, above all,

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the hierarchical treatises—offers and uses ‘images’ both as theological instruments and as means of description, although it does not endorse the veneration of holy images or icons.

A considerable amount of literature has outlined specific aspects of the Pseudo-Dionysian aesthetic language; but, as far as I know, nobody has held a wider approach and taken into account its entire doctrinal and historical contexts.⁵ Even when scholars traced the theological background of relevant terms they have not explained why Pseudo-Dionysius attributed new meanings to them. For example, how the difference between liturgical symbols and biblical images, which Pseudo-Dionysius outlined in his hierarchical treatises, impacted his theology and cosmology remains unclear.⁶ Even if the divergence between liturgical symbols and biblical images has been cursorily noted,⁷ its source has not been traced. Two points, however, remain undisputed: Pseudo-Dionysius inherited and developed a long-standing Christian topic, namely, the imitation of God, and he emphasised the power of liturgy in its connection with Jesus’ life and actions.⁸

This chapter aims to trace how Pseudo-Dionysius re-shaped the idea of liturgy and biblical exegesis (notwithstanding the fact that he refers to old Christian traditions in his approach to biblical exegesis⁹) and argues that he managed to do so through an innovative and imaginative re-employment of Neoplatonic language and ideas. First of all, I shall examine how the sensible realm is described in the *Corpus Dionysiacum* as consisting of sacraments and biblical images: while sacraments are meant to deify men through their mimetic power, that is, by transmitting the divine pattern they imitate,¹⁰ biblical images are not supposed to convey intellectual contents, but rather to awaken human knowledge. Moreover, I will explore the idea that the main source from which Pseudo-Dionysius drew his definition of two different types of images or symbols—similar and dissimilar—should be identified in Proclus’ *Commentary on Plato’s Republic*, which, in this context, has been widely neglected by scholars. Proclus’ commentary already suggested a polarity between an iconic (or mimetic)¹¹ and a symbolic method regarding the many ways to investigate nature, compose poetry, and interpret myths, which, I argue, Pseudo-Dionysius applied to biblical images and liturgical symbols. The striking result of this process is that Dionysius describes the head of the Christian hierarchy, the bishop, as an ‘intellectual painter’ who creates an accurate imitation of a divine model, namely, the liturgy, echoing many types already found in Proclus such as demiurge, painter, and theurgist.

In order to shed light on this hypothesised connection with Proclus, I will first focus on Proclus' writings as the primary source for understanding the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius, and then on the latter's views on Scriptures and sacraments as aesthetic categories.

PROCLUS' AESTHETICS AND ITS METAPHYSICAL BACKGROUND

Proclus' architecture of reality relies on two ideas. First, the transcendent principle that everything is the One 'which is identical to the Good'¹² and is absolutely transcendent. Second, that lower levels of reality are organised in a triadic system, namely, Being–Life–Intellect, each divided in multiple triads; similarly, he asserts that the One–Good is God.¹³ As a result, philosophy coincides with theology, since the first Cause from which the manifold descends is, at the same time, the First God from which all the inferior gods originate. The One, which is by definition absolutely simple and united, can be the cause and the origin of the manifold because 'Every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and reverts upon it'.¹⁴ Material and immaterial beings proceed from the unity to the manifold, or return back: 'all procession is accomplished through a likeness of the secondary to the primary', 'all reversion is accomplished through a likeness'¹⁵ of the reverting terms to the goal of reversion'.¹⁶ Procession and reversion create a sympathy between all things and dimensions. As a result, 'in Proclus' system, symbol and sympathy are complementary notions. Only where a bond of sympathy links together the unseen and the visible are symbols possible'.¹⁷ We shall turn now to the following problem: what a symbol properly is according to Proclus?

SYMBOLIC AND ICONIC METHOD IN PROCLUS

A passage in Proclus' commentary on Platos' *Timaeus* sets out a precise distinction between the iconic and the symbolic method:

Those who explain the return to the constitution more in accordance with ethics say that it is showing us that we should embark upon the study of the universe [only] when we have acquired orderly patterns of behaviour. Others commend the view that it has been placed before the account of all nature as an image (ὡς εἰκόνα) of the entire organization of the world, explaining that the Pythagoreans had the habit of placing before their scientific instruction an indication of the topics investigated, by means of

similes and *images*¹⁸ (διὰ τῶν ὁμοίων καὶ τῶν εἰκόνων). It is after this that they introduce the inexpressible illustration of the same things through their symbols (διὰ τῶν συμβόλων ἀπόρητον). [...] So here too the epitome of the constitution preceding the account of nature brings us face to face with the making of all things through images (εἰκονικῶς), while the narration about the Atlantines does so through symbols. And in general myths have the tendency to give an indication of things through symbols (συμβολικῶς).¹⁹

Since divine revelation, that is myth, cannot be directly manifested,²⁰ it would be firstly presented under a straightforward image (εἰκόν) and then the same truth would be given through symbols (σύμβολα). Images are clearer, while symbols are associated with secret revelations, the former associated with similarity and the latter with oppositions and dissimilarities.²¹ The εἰκόν resembles paradigms (παράδειγματα) and conveys its message overtly,²² whereas symbols are more sacred and therefore are covert forms, difficult to interpret as their appearances differ from their divine inner meaning. Iconic myths are easier to understand, since they are associated with the artistic and demiurgic action²³—both material and visible—while the symbolic ones are associated with mystical rites and ceremonies, theurgy, and secret mysteries.²⁴ More significantly, only images (εἰκόνες) can imitate the pattern they are copies of, whereas symbols are opposite and divergent from their referential model and, thus, ‘they bear no resemblance with them’.²⁵

‘Images’ and ‘symbols’ have several meanings in Proclus²⁶ and some scholars have remarked on the interchangeability of these terms. Even if there is a clear distinction in his allegoric method, ‘Proclus himself does not follow it very strictly... and [the distinction] cannot be used in the exegesis of Platonic dialogue’.²⁷ Although the ambiguity of Proclus’s usage of these terms is unquestionable, it is also clear that he utilises a twofold exegetical method—a symbolic one and an iconic (or mimetic) one—based on a distinction between simpler and more complex myths. We can see this dual method in the *Commentary on Plato’s Republic*, when Proclus deals with ‘literary symbols [which] signify their meaning not according to any economy of imitation or mimesis’²⁸: poetry, that is, theology, is repeatedly compared to images and discussed in the same way figurative arts are approached; poetry-theology and arts are then included in the same aesthetic framework and analysed through the same language.

THE POET: A THEURGIST OR AN ARTIST?

The *Fifth* and *Sixth* essays of Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Republic* represent the core of his allegoric theory.²⁹ Exegesis of Plato's work was considered to be the first and foremost aim of philosophy.³⁰ Considering that the mystic and sacred origins of Greek philosophy lie in ancient poetry, namely, in Homer and Hesiod,³¹ Proclus intends to explain the reason why 'Plato is not admitting poetry but rather exiling it from the rightly constituted State', and how there could be any reconciliation between the man who Plato defines as 'divine poet' in the *Phaedo* (95a) and the one who is 'third in line from the truth' in the *Republic* (10.597e). The first point is approached in the *Fifth Essay*, the second in the *Sixth*, where the arguments elaborated by Proclus set out his allegorical theory, which also forms the basis of his poetic and aesthetic theories. In the *Fifth Essay* Proclus states that poetic production must be strictly mimetic, whereas in the *Sixth*, he states that is 'possible for poetry to designate things and beings that are beyond expression in the mimetic mode'.³² I shall first examine the *Fifth Essay*, and then the *Sixth*.

In response to Plato's rejections of poetry, in the *Fifth Essay* Proclus states that all poetry is mimetic and that poets commit two kinds of mistakes³³: either, 'they produce non resembling imitations of the things they write about', or 'they produce accurate imitations of the things, but as imitators of diverse and complex things, their imitations are appropriately diverse and complex'.³⁴ Doing this, poets literally use a non-resembling imitation (ἀνομοίως μιμούμενοι) of Gods with an emotional language full of disgraceful terms (αἰσχρὰ ὀνόματα) used as screens (παραπετάσματα) for the truth of Gods which is not suitable for the young to understand.³⁵

Non-resembling mimesis involves two approaches: either 'the imitation is immediately maladapted to what it imitates', or 'the imitation is well-adapted but not immediately so, because of the strangeness that enters as a function of the screen of *mythification*'.³⁶ The first point Proclus wants to make is that the dissimilarity described with poetic words is unreal and does not correspond to the truth. For example, when passions such as rapes, wanderings, adulteries, etc. are attributed to heroes and gods, this is to conceal the truth under a cover. The second point is that complexity (ποικιλία) is completely inappropriate for education, 'which [instead] is concerned to impress upon the characters of the educated exclusively good deeds and good language'.³⁷ The power of mimesis on souls,

especially on those of the young, is a very important issue which Proclus emphasises and which Pseudo-Dionysius follows closely.³⁸ Proclus writes:

Our soul naturally enjoys imitations (Φύσει γὰρ τὴν ψυχὴν ἡμῶν χαίρειν τοῖς μιμήμασιν) – that is also why we all love stories – and when we are young, if we habitually take in all sorts of imitations, we come to resemble them through empathy, and we ourselves turn out to be people of that sort, our characters complex and diverse because of our enjoying that complexity, ourselves molded by the diversity of the imitations (τοῖς ποικίλοις ὑπὸ τῶν ποικίλων πλαττόμενοι μιμημάτων).³⁹

The reason why poetry shapes complex rather than simple souls is expounded in the *Timaeus*, which holds that it is easier for the mimetic poets to imitate what belongs to the environment in which they grew up in. Poets, who consort with complex people of all sorts, fall short of being able to represent simple, unaffected people and therefore produce poems accordingly (ποικίλοις καὶ παντοδαποῖς ἀπάδειν τῆς τῶν ἀπλῶν καὶ ἀπλᾶστων μιμήσεως καὶ τὰ ποιήματα παρέχεσθαι τοιαῦτα).⁴⁰

Let's focus on some crucial keywords in Proclus. The human soul is involved in imitation. Imitation can be dangerous for young souls, but for the same reason that complexity (ποικιλία) is a more suitable form of expression for those who have a higher intellectual complexity. Here we are presented with a twofold mimetic poetry that is either truthfully imitative—and in this case, suitable for education only when it is rid of emotions and contrasting meanings—or non-resembling, imitative poetry which is inappropriate for pedagogic goals and only meaningful to the initiated. This second genre is compared to the ritual formulas of the mysteries, that is, theurgic symbols.⁴¹

Hence, poetry has no place in the Platonic *polis* as it is unsuitable for any pedagogic scope. According to Proclus, Plato rejects tragedy and comedy for the education of youth, in particular, for three reasons: the complexity of the imitations, the immoderate emotions they elicit, and the false and inappropriate representation of gods and heroes they present.⁴² Proclus provides the final definition of the poet:

The poet is an imitator. Every imitator has as his goal making something similar to his model (ὁ ποιητὴς μιμητὴς πᾶς μιμητὴς τέλος ἔχει ὁμοίον ποιῆσαι τῷ παραδείγματι), whether it is going to please people or not.⁴³

We now look at Proclus' *Sixth Essay* in which the formulation of two kinds of mimesis is enriched by two further considerations. First, the essay aims to show that, although Plato defines poets as 'divine' and 'third in line from the truth', there is no conflict. Second, in order to explain the aforementioned, Proclus provides a new classification of myths, distinguishing between those that are inspirational and those that are pedagogic. The former are initially described as, apparently, 'far from goodness, beauty and order, ugly and monstrous (αἰσχρὰ καὶ ἔκθεσμα) [...] fantasies full of horror'.⁴⁴ Although this kind of myth, expressed 'through words diametrically opposed to the things concerned',⁴⁵ are less attractive than the kind of myth that "combines elements that aim at the beautiful and the Good", the latter is as inappropriate as the knowledge of the many. In fact, it appears wrong to many because its goal and meaning are not visible to them: 'truth that is rooted in secrecy, and uses visible screens (φαινομένοις παραπετάσμασι) for the concepts that are obscure and unknowable to the many'.⁴⁶ The 'many' do not grasp the truth because their souls are not ready for it. By contrast, the initiated are elevated to the gods through mysteries and initiations in which symbols play a dramatic role since symbols are the way for gods to manifest themselves to men and the way for men to reach gods.⁴⁷ Only by becoming initiated, does intellectual illumination (νοερά ἔλλαμψις) expel any irrationality from the initiates' souls.⁴⁸ As a result, true knowledge relies on the ability to interpret symbols in their sacred vest, namely, as an anagogic medium.

Having explained the ugliness of the terms, Proclus continues to explain the distinction between educational myths and inspirational myths (παιδευτικούς λεγομένους καὶ τοὺς ἐνθεαστικωτέρους).⁴⁹ The educational myth is realistic, appropriate, and addressed to the divine through the similarity of symbols.⁵⁰ The inspirational myth is made by 'absurd symbols ... [which] give a non-resembling portrait of the divine... [and which] in no way prepare for us a secret sympathy leading to participation in [the life of] the gods'.⁵¹ As a result, Proclus suggests that the function of ugliness in symbolic poetry is not only to keep the profane away from the truth,⁵² but first and foremost to incite us to seek the secret truth and not content ourselves with a superficial level of seeing symbols but not perceiving their divine meaning.⁵³

Thus, even if poets 'sometimes express through images representing models, sometimes through symbols',⁵⁴ Proclus divides the poetic

method into two parts. One part might be called iconic or mimetic, which is characterised by similarity and uses easy, simple, and appropriate terms, and which addresses the education of the youth.⁵⁵ The other might be defined as mainly symbolic⁵⁶:

The one educational and the other initiatory. The one prepares for moral virtue; the other offers contact with the divine. The one is able to be of some advantage to most of us, but the other is suited to a very small number. The first is shared in common and generally intelligible to humanity, but the other is secret and unsuited to those who are not eager to be perfectly rooted in the divine. The one corresponds to the condition of youth; the other is only revealed through sacrifice and through the mystical tradition.⁵⁷

The former, that is the iconic or mimetic, is closely related to the work of nature, copying noetic patterns in material forms—something that makes the mimetic poet similar to the demiurge and to an artist.⁵⁸ Conversely, the poet who uses oppositions and veils impersonates the theurgist who performs rites through *symbola*, which includes both material objects and vocal formulas.

PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS AND THE NECESSITY OF SYMBOLISM

The legacy of Neoplatonic metaphysics in Pseudo-Dionysian writings has been widely analysed.⁵⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius shares with Damascius—the last scholar of the school of Athens—the idea of God transcending the One–Good, namely, the cause of all beings, beyond Being and Intelligibility.⁶⁰ Consequently, far beyond Proclus, Pseudo-Dionysian theology involves a more developed doctrine of participation.⁶¹ Progressive descent of divine light enables the transmission of divinity from the highest causes down to the lowest effects of creation. Thus, Pseudo-Dionysius' articulation of transcendence and immanence differs only superficially from the theory of Proclus,⁶² since the two schemes diverge only in their descriptions of the material world.

According to Proclus, the cosmos is primarily a tangible icon of the intelligible world, shaped by the demiurge following an intelligible pattern. However, in the Pseudo-Dionysian understanding, nature is replaced by the ecclesiastical and angelic orders.⁶³ As a result, both the procession (πρόοδος) of God to man and the return (ἐπιστροφή) of man

to God can only pass through the heavenly and ecclesiastical hierarchies. It is not surprising, then, that the goal of the Celestial Hierarchy is, 'the assimilation and the unity to God', and for the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, it is the transmission of the divinely inspired words (λόγια, by which Dionysius refers to the Sacred Scriptures) which lift us up to the divine.⁶⁴ As Pseudo-Dionysius states, the core of 'our hierarchy' is liturgical symbols descending from a divine tradition,⁶⁵ which makes what is immaterial understandable to us through material things. Symbols, that is, liturgical actions and objects, imitate the acts of Jesus and their deifying power. Moreover, biblical material images are also crucial for human knowledge because they are shaped in such a way as to awaken the human mind and push it in an anagogic direction.⁶⁶ As sensible liaison to the divine, liturgical symbols and biblical icons differ in a crucial aspect: while the former are mimetic in that they try to imitate their divine models, the latter are dissimilar and far from them. Sacraments bring human souls to divinity through the resemblance of simple and plain representation of the model, while the absurdity and the monstrosity of complex biblical images are intended to shock and awaken human minds.⁶⁷ As for Proclus, so, too, for Pseudo-Dionysius; the terms 'eikon' and 'symbolon' are generally interchangeable even though the first is largely used to indicate biblical images while the second denotes sacraments.⁶⁸ Like his predecessor, Pseudo-Dionysius maintains a clear, if implicit distinction between an iconic—mimetic use of these words and a symbolic—non-resembling one.⁶⁹

In the next pages, I will first retrace the development from the iconic and symbolic poetries of Proclus to the mimetic liturgy and symbolic exegesis of Pseudo-Dionysius. I will demonstrate that symbolism plays a major role in the Pseudo-Dionysian system, which also affects his cosmology. In fact, the procession into plurality implies the divine descent into symbolism, whereas the return from multiplicity to the divine unity is nothing but the anagogic movement through symbols towards the upper world.⁷⁰ The first action is a manifestation of plurality, while the second is one of unification, in the direction of the simplicity of God.⁷¹ This new conception of the world is a significant shift and I will seek to demonstrate that it was consistently influenced by Proclus's conception of poetry, as has been outlined above.

Also, in what is conventionally known as *Letter IX*, Pseudo-Dionysius hints at the symbolism that is more broadly developed in the hierarchical treatises. This symbolism is crucial for understanding how Proclus'

conception of poetry impacted Pseudo-Dionysius' exegetical method.⁷² In explaining the meanings of biblical expressions, the author suggests that, although they appear as absurd and disrespectful, they are no more than 'perceptible symbols' (διὰ τῶν αἰσθητῶν συμβόλων) that manifest an unspeakable wisdom (ἀπόρρητον σοφία).⁷³ However, the many (πολλοί) only perceive the monstrosity (τερατείας) depicted in these images.⁷⁴ Moreover, words are 'screens' (παραπετάσματα), which the many cannot see through, whereas the initiated 'know how to pack away the childish imagination regarding the sacred symbols'.⁷⁵ Simplicity versus complexity, many versus few: Procline pairs are hereby presented. Symbols serve to veil divinity for some and yet have an epiphanic role for others.⁷⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius makes a clear distinction between these two aspects:

theological tradition has a dual aspect, the ineffable and mysterious on the one hand, the open and more evident on the other. The one resorts to symbolism and involves initiation. The other is philosophic and employs the method of demonstration. The inexpressible is bound up with what can be articulated. The one uses persuasion and imposes the truthfulness of what is asserted. The other acts and, by means of a mystery which cannot be taught, it puts souls firmly in the presence of God.⁷⁷

Pseudo-Dionysius recalls here the distinction Proclus made between the symbolic method and the mimetic. The one is convenient to the initiated, while the other is convenient to the many; the one fashioned in simple terms, the other imbued with oppositions and unusual words.⁷⁸ The final proof of this connection is the goal of images:

the impassive element of the soul (τὸ μὲν ἀπαθὲς τῆς ψυχῆς) is attuned to the simple and interior visions of those images which have the shape of the divine (τῶν θεοειδῶν ἀγαλμάτων). On the other hand, the passionate element of the soul (τὸ δὲ παθητικόν), as befits its nature, honors and rises up toward the most divine realities by means of the carefully combined elements of the representations. These symbolic veils are akin (τὰ πέφυκε παραπετάσματα) [to that part of the soul], as seen by the example of those who, having been taught the things of God in a way which is clear and unveiled, go on then to picture in themselves some image guiding them to conception of the theological teaching which they have listened to.⁷⁹

These borrowings from Proclus confirm, first of all, the deep influence that late Neoplatonic speculation exerted on Pseudo-Dionysian thought

about symbolism. Moreover, they certify that the *Commentary on Plato's Republic* was undoubtedly among the writings of Proclus to which Pseudo-Dionysius mostly turned to regarding this topic.

Dionysian scholarship has re-traced only a few similarities between Proclus' commentary on Plato's *Republic* and the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. I can demonstrate this commentary was the main source through which Pseudo-Dionysius absorbed Proclus' teaching on symbolism.⁸⁰ The distinction between the two methods used in terms of exegesis in Dionysius' *Epistle IX*, which follows Proclus, is later developed in two different kinds of symbols: those of the celestial hierarchy, namely, biblical images which are characterised by dissimilarity and ugliness, and those of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, that is liturgical symbols wherein every unlikeness disappears, superseded by a totalising mimesis (or similarity) (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2).

BIBLICAL DISSIMILARITIES

Exegesis is so important in the *Celestial Hierarchy* that sometimes it appears to overcome angelology.⁸¹ Throughout the text, the focus is primarily on descriptions of biblical images as physical and material.⁸² Scriptures are formed as sensible images (αἰσθητὰ εἰκόνα). They are presented as a ποικιλία,⁸³ that is, a complexity or variety of often fantastic images (αἰσχρά).⁸⁴ Moreover, their hideous nature is not limited to images, but also concerns the theological tradition itself. The key word regarding images as described in the *Celestial Hierarchy* is *dissimilarity*: the image itself does not resemble its original model. However, the purpose of images is not to copy the model, but rather to shock—through their very monstrosity—the soul and thus hasten its intellectual trajectory towards true knowledge, beyond the appearances of images and symbols.

The second chapter in the *Celestial Hierarchy* outlines a biblical and theological tradition based on images and symbols characterised exclusively by dissimilarity, as already found in Proclus. Pseudo-Dionysius asserts that in approaching the 'variety of the revealing symbols of scripture (ἐν ποικιλίᾳ τῶν ἐκφαντορικῶν συμβόλων)',⁸⁵ literal interpretations, such as those of the profane, should be avoided. In such readings, the biblical representations of the angels are seen as absurd (ἄπεμφαινούσας) and they should be depicted in a 'more appropriate and related fashioning'.⁸⁶ But, the biblical representations of the celestial intelligences do not correspond with their actual appearances. Rather,

Table 2.1 Symbolic framework

<i>Commentary on Plato's Republic</i>		<i>Celestial Hierarchy II</i>	<i>Ep. IX</i>
Essay 5: Poets are ἀνομοίως μιμούμενοι because they produce αἰσχρὰ ὀνόματα which are παραπετάσματα; this poetry is not appropriate for the young because of the ποικιλία affects the unity of the soul; it is suitable for the souls of the initiated and it is appropriate for the hieratic art; they produce then ἀνομοίως μιμήματα		Scriptures are formed by αἰσθητά εἰκόνα; are presented as a ποικιλία and are full of absurd images (αἰσχρὰ); they are absurd (ἀπεμ. φανουόσας) characterized by δυσμορφία and δυσαιδέα; they are described as ἀνόμοιους ὁμοόσεις. The ugliness of the images means to: hide truth from the many (πολλοί); push the higher part of the soul (ἀνωφρεῖς τῆς ψυχῆς) towards the above realities. This converts the souls from the sensible things to the ἀληθείας ζήτησις, which is the goal of the biblical images	‘The impassive element of the soul (τὸ μὲν ἀπάθεξ τῆς ψυχῆς) is attuned to the simple and interior visions of those images which have the shape of the divine (τῶν θεοειδῶν ἀγαλμάτων). On the other hand, the passionate element of the soul (τὸ δὲ παθητικόν), as benefits its nature, honors and rises up toward most divine realities by way of the carefully combined elements of the representations. Theses symbolic veils are akin (τὰ πέφυκε παραπετάματα) [to that part of the soul], as seen by the example of those who...
Essay 6: Poetic productions might be called as well ἐνθεστυκωτέρους λεγομένους. Expressed through αἰσχρὰ καὶ ἐθέσμεα; the ugliness serves to cover the truths from the profanes – πολλοί – but above all to push pure souls to the ἀληθείας ζήτησιν; it uses visible screens (φανοιμένοις παραπετάμασι)			Scriptures expresses by παραπετάσματα and τερατείας; it needs to get rid of childish imaginations (παιδαριώδη φαντασία) to get to the truth Perceptible symbols (διὰ τῶν αἰσθητῶν συμβόλων) manifest a mystic wisdom (ἀπόρρητον σοφία)

Table 2.2 Mimetic framework

<i>Commentary on Plato's Republic</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical Hierarchy III</i>
<p>Essay 5: Always looks at the archetypes (πᾶς μιμητῆς τέλος ἔχει ὅμοιον ποιῆσαι τῷ παραδείγματι) Poets are ὁμοίως μιμοῦμενοι; it is good for the education when free of emotions and complexity The good poetry make young people suited for virtue: κατ' ἀρετὴν διατιθέναι δυναμένων τὰς τῶν ἀκουόντων ψυχὰς It operates by similarity (ὁμοίους πλάττειν τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις, ἀλλὰ μὴ διὰ τῶν ἀνομοίων ἐθέλγειν αὐτὰ κρύπτειν)</p> <p>Essay 6: This kind of poetry is pedagogical: παιδευτικούς λεγομένους. It is made for the many or the young in soul: τὸ μὲν ἐστὶ παιδευτικόν. τὸ μὲν πρὸς τὴν ἡθικὴν; τὸ μὲν τοὺς πολλοὺς... Expressed by similar symbols (δι' ὁμοιότητος τῶν συμβόλων)</p>	<p>The whole hierarchy is imitative; the ἀρχέτυποι are directly connected to their εἰκόνες; they are of help to the τελειούμενοι for the education of their souls (ψυχαγωγίαν) The bishop (ιεράρχης) described as a divine painter who always looks at the noetic archetype (τὴν ἀρχέτυπον νόησιν) to produce a correct imitation; they are always appropriate images (ἀφομοιώσεις) and are like images in the souls thanks to the virtue (τὰς κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐν ψυχαῖς παραφθάρτους εἰκόνας) In the sacramental symbols is reflected the beauty of the archetypes (τῶν ἀρχετύπων κάλλος) and when initiates truly have this divine beauty in their souls, they possess the most beautiful imitation (κάλλιστον μίμημα) The many (πολλοί) cannot see these images; they are ἀνομοιοί while bishops and initiates are θεομίμητοι,</p>

their dissimilarity protects them from the profane. Moreover, this dissimilarity is not outrageous, but provides a more effective point of departure for our uplifting.⁸⁷ Indeed, the fact that images are absurd (ἄπεμφαιόν) or outrageous deformities (αἰσχροτήης) induces Pseudo-Dionysius to theorise a dual path for sacred revelation: 'firstly, by proceeding naturally through sacred images in which like represents like, while also using formations which are dissimilar and even entirely inadequate and ridiculous'.⁸⁸ Scholars have remarked upon the relationship between similarity and dissimilarity, generally referring to the opposite terms of likeness-unlikeness (ὁμοιότης-ἀνομοιότης) that are discussed in the *Divine Names* and in the *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*.⁸⁹ I argue that the most influencing source is the theory of poetry expounded by Proclus in the *Commentary on Plato's Republic*.⁹⁰ According to Pseudo-Dionysius also, the more dissimilar the image is, the more anagogic power it can exert on the soul:

it was to avoid this kind of misunderstanding among those incapable of rising above visible beauty that the pious theologians so wisely and upliftingly stooped to incongruous dissimilarities (αἱ ἀπεμφαίνουσαι τῶν ὁμοιοτήτων), for by doing this they took account of our inherent tendency toward the material and our willingness to be lazily satisfied by base images (αἰσχροῦ εἰκόνας). At the same time they enabled the part of the soul which longs for the things above (τὸ ἀνωφερὲς τῆς ψυχῆς) actually to rise up.⁹¹

In sum, dissimilar shapes ensure the truth remains inaccessible to the profane, preventing the souls of the initiated from dwelling on forms as true images. Moreover, rather than being ridiculous and offensive, they honour the celestial paradigms. Finally, they initiate the search for truth by avoiding focus on the material content, which is unbearable to the eye, thus directing the beholder beyond mere appearance.⁹² These aspects are expounded upon in the *Celestial Hierarchy* and show striking similarities to Proclus' symbolic myth: instead of Proclus' dissimilar imitations (ἀνομοίως μιμήματα), Dionysius relies upon the expression dissimilar similarity (ἀνόμοιος ὁμοιώσεις).⁹³

MIMETIC LITURGY

The aim of the ecclesiastical hierarchy is to transmit and to explain the sacred symbols to the initiated ones.⁹⁴ Indeed, 'sacral-liturgical symbols encompass practically the whole object-related and spatial-temporal environment of the church'.⁹⁵ The word 'symbol' is used quite frequently in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, probably because this term had long since been adopted in the liturgical lexicon of the Christian tradition.⁹⁶ 'Icon' is also used. The *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* offers descriptions of each of the six sacraments and their related anagogical interpretation, recalling the similarities proposed in the *Epistle IX*, or Proclus' mimetic mode.⁹⁷ There is an evident aesthetic improvement from the *Celestial Hierarchy*. There are no more references to any ugly, monstrous, absurd, or outrageous appearances.⁹⁸ Rather, this is the place for absolute simplicity, which is by definition the main feature of God, the One-Good, and of the angels. Mimesis and similarity, which were only suggested in the *Celestial Hierarchy* and in the *Epistle IX* as proper elements of the second method, namely, the mimetic method, are effectively at work in the *ekklesia*, that is the Church. Not surprisingly, the main feature

of the ecclesiastical hierarchy is to be *imitative*.⁹⁹ This change, from dissimilarity to mimesis, that is, from the celestial to the ecclesiastical domain, can be elucidated by examining Pseudo-Dionysius' descriptions of archetypes and divine painters.

ARCHETYPES

Commenting on the rite of the communion (in the chapter on contemplation or θεωρία), Pseudo-Dionysius asserts:

and now, my fine young man, following this imagery (μετὰ τὰς εἰκόνας) which in orderly and sacred fashion conforms to the truth of its divine original (τῶν ἀρχετύπων κάλλος), I must go on to offer spiritual guidance to those yet being initiated. The variegated and sacred composition of the symbols is not unprofitable to them, even though it presents only their external features. The sacred chanting and the readings teach the rules of virtuous living. Above all, it teaches the need for the total purification of the self from destructive evil.

It is possible at this point in the liturgy for participants to contemplate archetypes. However, in order to really see them, the soul must be properly educated to move from the contemplation of a variety of symbols (in which the one who is imperfect in soul remains) to the 'contemplation of the conceptual things clearly reflecting the blessed original beauty of the archetypes'¹⁰⁰; this is, according to Pseudo-Dionysius, what it means 'to move from the effects to the causes'.¹⁰¹ In addition, the symbolic imagery that envelops the Eucharistic rite is meant to 'fill the eyes of your mind with a unifying and unveiled light',¹⁰² since nothing of the sacrament is kept covered. Once more, liturgical symbols *show* rather than hide.

During the performance of liturgical actions while celebrating the Eucharist,¹⁰³ the bishop uses mimetic symbols to border the sacred space of the church.¹⁰⁴ The sacrament is itself stable and motionless. However, through the actions of the bishop, the sacrament proceeds out to the many as a plural symbol and then returns to the altar as a unified idea:

similarly, the divine sacrament of the *synaxis* remains what it is, unique, simple, and indivisible and yet, out of love for humanity, it is pluralised in a sacred variegation of symbols. It extends itself in order to include all

the hierarchical imagery. Then it draws all these varied symbols together into unity, returns to its own inherent oneness, and confers unity to all those sacredly uplifted to it. And it is the same with the divine hierarch. He generously hands down to his inferiors that unique hierarchic understanding which especially his own. He resorts to a multitude of sacred enigmas. Then, freely and untrammelled by anything beneath him, he returns to his own starting point without having any loss.¹⁰⁵

The minister himself conducts a process of uplifting the manifold to the unity:

in his mind he journeys toward the one. With a clear eye he looks upon the basic unity of those realities underlying the sacred rites. He makes the divine return to the primary things the goal of his procession toward secondary things, which he had undertaken out of love for humanity.¹⁰⁶

This kind of symbol proceeds to the manifold but always remains unified in itself. It never changes its own simplicity and unity as an archetype. For this reason, image and archetype are always united in liturgy and it is impossible to separate them by any means. Moreover, it is the role of liturgical symbols rather than that of biblical images to awaken the soul and guide it to knowledge.

THE DIVINE PAINTERS

The themes I have discussed can be definitively clarified through the metaphor of the 'divine painters' found in the fourth chapter of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. Pseudo-Dionysius describes the consecration of the ointment (μύρον) at length. First, he states that divine beauties are concealed just as the ointment is concealed on the altar:

they [the divine beauties] reveal themselves solely to minds capable of grasping them. They shine within our souls only by way of appropriate images (ἁφομοιόσει), images which, like themselves, have the virtue of being incorruptible. Hence virtuous conformity to God can only appear as an authentic image of its object (κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐν ψυχαῖς ἀπαραφθάρτους εἰκόνας) when it rivets its attention on that conceptual and fragrant beauty... only on this condition can the soul impress upon itself and reproduce within itself *the* most beautiful imitation (τὸ κάλλιστον μίμημα).¹⁰⁷

Hence, liturgical images are not dualistic; they do not consist of material and spiritual parts, but rather of mirrors, meaning, intellectual patterns corresponding to their own images impressed on the souls through virtue. Virtue makes it possible to have the most beautiful imitation within the soul itself, the imitation of spiritual beauty and of divine virtue. Pseudo-Dionysius could not have found a better way to explain what happens in the sacrament than by means of painting:

in the domain of perceptible images, the artist keeps an eye constantly on the original and never allows himself to be sidetracked or to have his attention divided by any other visible object. If he does this, then one may presume to say that whatever the object which he wishes to depict he will, so to speak, reproduce a second one, so that one entity can be taken for the other, though materially they are actually different; it is also the case of those artists who have love of beauty in their mind. They take an image of it within their minds. The concentration and the persistence of their contemplation of this fragrant, secret beauty enables them to produce an exact likeness of God (τό ἀπλανήσ και θεοειδέστατον ἴνδαλμα).¹⁰⁸

In order to render a good depiction, the pattern must be watched without distractions and then reproduced in the copy. The same is meant to happen in the case of divine painters, that is, of those who celebrate the sacraments: their actions and the objects they use must be a perfect imitation of God. The only difference between *material* painting and *intelligible* painting, is obviously, the pattern:

and so these divine artists (οἱ θεῖοι γραφεῖς), who shape their intellect focusing (τὸ νοερόν ἑαυτῶν ἀμεταστρέπτως εἰδοποιούντες), gazing the transcendental, fragrant and intelligible beauty, they do not practice the virtues called for by imitation of God to be seen by men, as scripture puts it; rather, they sacredly behold as in an image (ὥς ἐν εἰκόνι) the infinitely sacred things of the Church disguised in the rite of the ointment. That is why they too sacredly disguise whatever is sacred and virtuously godlike in their intellect, imitating and depicting God (τοῦ θεομιμήτου και θεογράφτου νοῶς), they gaze solely on the intelligible archetype (τὴν ἀρχέτυπον νόησιν).¹⁰⁹

The bishop resembles the new demiurge who shapes the world, in this case the Church, by gazing at the intelligible archetype and crafting the

world as an image of divine beauty and virtue. Indeed, ‘his own intellect imitates God’. In order to attain perfection in this imitation, no dissimilarity is allowed:

Not only do they [those who celebrate the sacraments] not look at dissimilar things (ἀθέατοι εἰσὶ τοῖς ἀνομοίοις), but they refuse to be dragged down toward the sight of them. And as one would expect of such people, they yearn only for what is truly beautiful and right (οὐδὲ τῶν δοκούντων εἰκὴ καλῶν καὶ δικαίων) and not for empty appearances. They do not gaze after that glory so stupidly praised by the mob. Imitating God, as they do, they can tell the difference between real beauty and real evil. They are the truly statues of God (ἀγάλματα θεῶν) of an infinitely divine fragrance. Because this is the truly fragrant, they have no time to return to what is dissimilar to the many, and it truly impresses only those souls which are true images of itself (πρὸς τὸ τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀνομοίως δοκοῦν οὐκ ἐπιστρέφεται ταῖς ἀληθέσιν αὐτῆς εἰκόσιν ἐντυποῦσα τὸ ἀνυπόκριτον).¹¹⁰

So deep is the assimilation through similarity that the bishop *becomes* a statue (ἀγάλματα) of God and, for this reason, he leaves aside dissimilarity and appearances. For the same reason, those who are impure in their soul because of fantasies and impurities are not allowed to join the ritual. The uninitiated, not surprisingly, are defined as ‘dissimilar’.¹¹¹ As a result, the entire ecclesiastical hierarchy has a mimetic structure.

CONCLUSIONS

Keeping a clear-cut division between the intelligible and the material world, both Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus needed to elaborate strategies to reconnect the second to the former. In the case of Proclus, participation and conversion are made possible by a demiurgic act, which is a work of art that reproduces the intelligible model in the copy.¹¹² Sometimes this can be a work of art, in other cases, it is a demiurgic act. These examples of a material production based on intelligible models can be also compared to theurgy, which, however, is often considered a second and diverse form of divine communication as it conceals the truth beneath opposing and ugly terms that are properly elements of rites and mysteries. In this sense, it is possible to isolate two ways of metaphysic participation in Proclus’ writings: iconic and symbolic.¹¹³ Although for Proclus, the terms ‘symbol’ and ‘icon’ are interchangeable,

the distinction between the two methods is undoubtedly marked and noticeable in the *Commentary on Plato's Republic*. Proclus proposes two paradigms: first is an inspired myth, which is suitable for the initiates, ugly and monstrous in its outlook in order to shock the soul and stimulate the search for truth, and which does not want to reveal the divine; second is the mimetic method, suitable for educating the young in soul, made of plain and easy figures, free from complexity and, above all, with the aim of representing the model of reference within the material object, both intended whether as artwork or natural object.

Pseudo-Dionysius, for his part, was very attentive to such a distinction.¹¹⁴ The terms he uses are unequivocally taken from the *Fifth* and *Sixth* essays of Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Republic*, and he clearly acknowledges the use of an iconic—mimetic method and a symbolic—dissimilar method. Moreover, these terms and this distinction constitute the foundations of his new vision of the cosmos.

Keeping in mind all of the above, I wish to make three final points. First of all, regarding his relationship with Proclus, the Pseudo-Dionysian cosmos coincides with the heavenly and ecclesiastical hierarchies. As a consequence, symbols and images of participation and the return to God are uniquely images and symbols of hierarchies. Nonetheless, Pseudo-Dionysius can build a new world only by characterising these images in an opposite way. As in Proclus, the terms 'image' and 'symbol' are interchangeable,¹¹⁵ but, conversely, in Pseudo-Dionysius, the symbolic world is opposed to the mimetic world. Biblical images are ugly, dissimilar, and useful in initiating the search for truth.

Secondly, related to the past exegetical traditions and the new method he meant to provide, Pseudo-Dionysius introduces the new idea of 'similar dissimilarity', which probably hides a deeper doctrinal goal. Even though his *Celestial Hierarchy* was intended as a treatise on the angels, the attention he dedicates to exegetical theory almost displaces the angels into the background.¹¹⁶ As one might guess from the second chapter of the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Pseudo-Dionysius had quite a sharp idea of the contrasts between literalists and allegorists regarding biblical interpretation. Through Proclus' categories, but investing them with new meaning, it seems that Pseudo-Dionysius tries to settle exegetical disputes advancing another idea of symbolism, namely, a third way in exegetical speculation.¹¹⁷

Thirdly and finally, with regards to the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the liturgy, we should consider that Pseudo-Dionysius is in line with the long mystagogic Syrian tradition,¹¹⁸ which allowed him the possibility of

a correspondence between human soul, earthly world (i.e., the Church), and the heavenly hierarchy through the actions of Christ as they are imitated by the liturgical rites. By imitating Jesus in his divine–human actions, men become *theomitetoι* (imitators of God).¹¹⁹ To this inheritance, Pseudo-Dionysius certainly added other elements of the Greek tradition,¹²⁰ which might be found in Proclus’ idea of mimesis. As a result, the Church (and its hierarchy) is the realm of mimesis, where the material world has been shaped through such a perfect mimesis, that is the whole liturgy and the sacraments, that the intelligible patterns are in the material world—something that would have been impossible for Proclus to accept. The *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* lacks any form of dissimilarity, complexity, teratology (that is the representation of fantastic monsters), or ugliness. It sums up the entire language of the assimilation to God, arguing that divinisation is achievable only through the liturgy, basing this on the resumption of Proclus’ iconic paradigm.¹²¹ In fact, sacramental actions are functional in the education of Christian believers without causing any upset. They are similar to a work of a ‘divine painter’ who looks to the intelligible model to create his own work, the church, which can be defined as ‘an icon’.¹²² The bishop is a kind of demiurge who proceeds from the intelligible to the sensible, reporting the former in the latter, but with two critical distinctions. First, the return (ἐπιστροφή) in the Pseudo-Dionysian world is horizontal and not vertical. In other words, the model towards which he returns is not in heaven, but in the sacraments and in the liturgical actions themselves. Second, the difference between the creation of sensible images and intelligible images underlined by Proclus disappears in the sacraments. This is the innovation—in a Christian sense—introduced by Pseudo-Dionysius; this is the meaning of the unity of intelligible patterns and material products, which can be explained—with caution—through the role of the Incarnation.¹²³ Since the ecclesiastical hierarchy imitates the human and divine acts of Christ, which he performed after the Incarnation, its goal and its structure are mimetic.

NOTES

1. For a recent appraisal, see Bogdanović (2011, 111–12).
2. Bychkov (2012, 31): ‘Terms as harmony, symphony, correspondence, order, orderliness, arrangement, purity, equality, proportionality, identity, rectitude, ‘are aesthetic terms, and not only for the contemporary mind ... They already fulfilled this function in ancient treatises

- on poetry, rhetoric, music and painting. And it was precisely in this ancient–aesthetic sense that the Church fathers used them in their own writings, in order to show and emphasise the *beauty* of divine creation’.
3. Tatarkiewicz (1970, 34–43) demonstrates that Pseudo-Dionysius, ahead of other church fathers, extended the meaning and the use of ‘Beauty’ from the moral range alone to philosophical speculation, see *DN* 4:701C–704B; 150–1.
 4. Not only are images and symbols crucial in their aesthetic heritage, they are also connected to the imitation (mimesis) performed in the liturgy through the Incarnation and thanks to the human actions of Jesus; for the correspondence between liturgical sacraments and the actions of Christ, see Golitzin (1994a, 167–208). Scazzoso (1967b, 133–49) explains the importance of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* for Theodore the Studite and John of Damascus; see also Lilla (1973, 612–22) and Ivanović (2010) for the doctrinal link between Pseudo Dionysius and iconoclasts. Louth (1997, 329) underlines that Pseudo-Dionysius ‘is full of images, but his attitude to them is ambivalent. He prefers images that are *unlike* their archetypes, whereas the religious images of the iconoclast period were definitely thought to be likenesses of the persons depicted’. As a consequence, both iconophiles and iconodules found an interesting source in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, see Alexakis (1996); see also Cameron (1992).
 5. Broader research of these themes would provide important advances in both Pseudo-Dionysian studies and investigations in the history of iconology.
 6. The most exhaustive work on this topic is Rorem (1984). Ivanović (2010) and Bychkov (2012) point out the importance of images in Pseudo-Dionysian vision of the world.
 7. Rorem (1984, 27–31).
 8. Golitzin (1994a).
 9. Golitzin (1994a, 349–70) for the Antiochene mystagogy as one of Pseudo-Dionysius’ main source; moreover, see De Lubac (1947, 180–226).
 10. Referred to Proclus’ works, ‘mimetic’ has the same connotation as ‘iconic’ (see below). Regarding the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, it is one of the key concepts of *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. The hierarchy itself and its different ranks play a mimetic role because the goal is *theomimesis*, that is, the imitation of God. This imitation is made possible by the correspondence between the liturgy, the core of the Church and the actions of Christ, which constitute the unity between human soul and the divine. Such a mimetic power is expressed by the bishop who, while performing rites, is as a painter who looks at an intelligible archetype

and who is able to reproduce it as sort of an artwork; secondly, perfect imitation of God is brought into the souls of those who are assisting him.

11. In Proclus' writings, 'iconic' refers to the method of writing poetry by straightforward images, resembling the model (i.e., gods, heroes, stories told, etc....) with clear and simple words, lacking obscenity and dissimilarity, and thus understandable. Thereby, the author of a such poetry must be as skilled as a painter whose artworks accurately reflect its original archetype. Aiming to produce a thorough imitation of an intelligible archetype, this method might be also called 'mimetic'. Pseudo-Dionysius takes the iconic method into the definition of the liturgical objects claimed in *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, see below.
12. Proclus, *Elements of Theology* 13; Dodds (trans.) (1963, 15).
13. Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Republic* 1.287.17 and *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* 1.28.6.
14. Proclus, *Elements* 35, Dodds (trans.) (1963, 39–41). Μονή-πρόοδος-ἐπιστροφή is the basic structure of all the triads which explains the way of existence of all the beings coming after the One; see Beierwaltes (1989, 161).
15. Likeness or similarity: from the Neoplatonic perspective, it is the manner in which things are brought to existence moving from a Cause. The products of the cause are made by likeness to that cause. The procession towards lower causes implies that a certain amount of similarity to higher causes must be preserved. Simultaneously, unlikeness (or dissimilarity) ensures hierarchical distance and differences between higher and lower ranks. Nonetheless, the likeness alone ensures the reversion from the last levels of beings towards the first causes. Pseudo-Dionysius inherits this framework and uses it in order to make the Church into the realm of likeness. Christ, as link between God and man, has the similarity to both in his divine-human nature and actions; since liturgy is an imitation of Christ's life, the sacraments in motion mean to believers the return to God (namely, the first Cause) through a model more similar to human nature.
16. Proclus, *Elements* 29 and 32; Dodds (trans.) (1963, 31–7).
17. See Coutler (1976, 57).
18. I find 'icons' more appropriate than 'analogies', as in Tarrant's translation.
19. Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* 1.29.31–30.19; Tarrant (trans.) (2007, 124–5). 'Making of all things' suits Proclus' thought better than 'creation', as per Tarrant's translation.
20. Poetry and myth are the oldest and most sacred manifestations of gods. Plato himself derived all the doctrines from poets, according to Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato* 1.25.5.

21. Proclus, *On Republic* 1.73.11.
22. Proclus, *On Timaeus* 1.33.14.
23. As a medium between the sensible and intelligible beings (*On Republic* 1.167.19–20), artistic actions and demiurgic activity are related, for both try to copy a model (*On Parmenides* 4.839.8–15; 5.994.24–40) through similarity (*On Parmenides* 4.850.1–7). The model imitated is material in the former case and it is intelligible in the latter; however, the participation works the same: ‘but we might also say that the products of participation are somewhat like the images (εἰκόνες) made by the art of painting, or sculpture, or some other technique. For it is by divine craftsmanship (ὑπὸ τῆς θείας δημιουργίας) that things here are shaped into likenesses of the divine Ideas, and this is why the whole sensible cosmos is called an image (εἰκόν) of the intelligible (*Tim.* 92c). This analogy is superior to the maker from the pattern, whereas they take these two factors as one’; *On Parmenides* 4.840.9–24; Morrow (trans.) (1987, 212). The painter and the demiurge are better compared in *On Parmenides* 4.847.
24. Proclus, *On Republic* 6.83.18.
25. Proclus, *On Republic* respectively 6.78.18–79.4 and 6.83.26–84.12.
26. These meanings are discussed in Moutsopoulos (1985).
27. Dillon (1976, 257). Sheppard (1980) and Lamberton (2012) support this point of view.
28. Struck (2010, 67).
29. The *Commentary on Plato’s Republic* is an exception in Proclus’ production due to its complexity and style. A prominent role in it is played by the *Fifth* and the *Sixth Essays* which deal with both poetics and allegory. See Gallavotti (1929), Sheppard (1980), Cardullo (1985), and Lamberton (1992, 2012). This is the text which presents the most complete exegetical and allegorical theory on poetry in the whole tradition of Neoplatonism.
30. Mansfeld (1994, 1): ‘Doing philosophy had become, by and large, the study of philosophical subjects through the interpretation of texts’.
31. Proclus, *Platonic Theology*, 1.5.25–30 and 1.6.17–23.
32. Lamberton (2012, xvii).
33. Proclus, *On Republic* 5.44.2: εἰκεν γὰρ μιμητικῆς ἀπάσης. Lamberton (2012, 7): ‘The assumption that the entire *pragmateia* of poetry is mimetic marks the difference between the underlying models of poetics in this essay and *Essay six*, where the mimetic is found to be just of three modes’. See also Sheppard (1980, 163–202).
34. Proclus, *On Republic* 5.44.1–5: τότε μὲν ἀνομοίως μιμούμενοι τὰ πράγματα, περὶ ὧν ποιοῦνται τοὺς λόγους, τότε δὲ ὁμοίως | μὲν ποικίλων δὲ ὄντες μιμηταὶ ποικίλας παρεχόμενοι τὰς μιμήσεις εἰκότως; Lamberton (trans.) (2012, 7).

35. Proclus, *On Republic* 5.44.14–17.
36. Proclus, *On Republic* 5.44.19–20: τῆς μυθοποιῆας φαινομένην ἀτοπίαν; Lambertson (trans.) (2012, 9).
37. Proclus, *On Republic* 5.46.11–13.
38. *Ep.* IX.1.1108A–B:197–8; *CH* II.3.141A–C:13.
39. Proclus, *On Republic* 5.46.19–20; Lambertson (trans.) (2012, 11).
40. Proclus, *On Republic* 5.46.15–28.
41. Proclus, *On Republic* 5.48.3–14; Lambertson (trans.) (2012, 15): ‘As he himself, in fact, asserts, even poetry that falsely represents the divine has its place in the intermediate mysteries, where that which is expressed in symbols is clearly appropriate to the general service of the divinities and the recital of these [symbols] constitutes an element of the hieratic art, since the very lives of the listeners have already been rooted in the gods, and now they listen to such things without danger. Through these utterances, the last of the spirits are also attracted, and [the utterances], working their enchantment with symbols of this sort, provide for the divine concern to flow unhindered from the spirits into us, as if they were saturated with the language and the stories they delight in’.
42. Proclus, *On Republic* 5.51.1–8: ἐν μὲν τὸ ποικίλον ὡς εἴρηται τῶν ἐν ταύταις μιμήσεων, ἕτερον δὲ τὸ τῶν παθῶν ἀμέτρως κινητικόν, ἃ βούλεται συστέλλειν κατὰ δύναμιν, τρίτον δὲ ἐπὶ τούτοις τὸ πρὸς πᾶσαν τὴν περὶ τὸ θεῖον καὶ ἡρωϊκὸν γένος αὐτῶν πλημμύλειαν εὐχερές. Avoiding these mistakes, the young prevent an atheistic fantasy (τὴν ἄθεον φαντασίαν); *On Republic* 51.12. Comedy and tragedy must be rejected because for their complexity (ποικιλία) they may damage what is ‘one and simple’ (τὸ ἐν καὶ τὸ ἀπλοῦν) in the soul; *On Republic* 5.50.23–51.15 and 5.50.8–15.
43. Proclus, *On Republic* 5.67.10–25: ‘...If he were going to be an imitator of the sort we have been describing, the goal he will look to is the good, for we shall assert that the goal of any virtuous activity – whether it involves imitation or not – is nothing other than the good. And one should pay attention to what this [good] is: this is a sort of poetry that is a precursor of the political life, raising the soul not toward the contemplative goal but toward the political one. This is why we said that the statesman has to define the measure of the poet’s activity, just as for the general, the doctor, and the rhetor – and that the poet in turn, following the guidelines he imposes, must write poetry in the manner described, directing the poems toward that goal’. Interestingly, Proclus states that ‘this kind of poetry is a precursor of political life’; 67.27; Lambertson (trans.) (2012, 51–2).
44. Proclus, *On Republic* 6.72.10–24; Lambertson (trans.) (2012, 63–4).
45. Proclus, *On Republic* 6.73.25–6.

46. Proclus, *On Republic* 6.74.15–18; Lamberton (trans.) (2012, 69).
47. This is the aim of the theurgy: see Shaw (1999, 578) and Coughlin (2006, 156–64).
48. Initiated lives and irrational lives contrast; see Proclus, *On Republic* 6.75.6–8: Τίς γὰρ οὐκ ἂν υνομολογήσειεν τὰ τε μυστήρια καὶ τὰς τελετὰς ἀνάγειν μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐνύλου καὶ θνητοειδοῦς ζωῆς τὰς ψυχὰς καὶ συνάπτειν τοῖς θεοῖς.
49. Proclus, *On Republic* 6.76.27–8.
50. Proclus, *On Republic* 6.84.3–7: Οἱ μὲν γὰρ εἰς τὴν τῶν νέων παιδείαν συντείνοντες ἔστωσαν πολὺ μὲν τὸ εἰκὸς ἔχοντες, πολλὴν δὲ τὴν ἐν τοῖς φαινομένοις τύποις τῆς μυθοποιΐας εὐπρέπειαν, πάντη δὲ τῶν ἐναντίων ὀνομάτων καθαρεύοντες· καὶ δι’ ὁμοιότητος τῶν συμβόλων πρὸς τὰ θεῖα συνάπτοντες.
51. Proclus, *On Republic* 6.83.29–84.2, Lamberton (trans.) (2012, 85): μηδὲ ὡς ἀνομοίως μιμοῦνται τὰ θεῖα διὰ | τῶν ἀπεμφαινόντων συμβόλων, ἀλλ’ ὡς οὐχὶ συμπάθειαν | ἡμῖν ἄρρητον προπαρασκευάζουσιν εἰς τὴν μετουσίαν τῶν θεῶν, Lamberton (trans.) (2012, 83–5).
52. See Proclus, *On Republic* 6.86.3.
53. Proclus, *On Republic* 6.85.17–19: Δοκεῖ δέ μοι καὶ τὸ τῶν ποιητικῶν πλάσμάτων τραγικὸν καὶ τὸ τερατῶδες καὶ τὸ παρὰ φύσιν κινεῖν τοὺς ἀκούοντας παντοδαπῶς εἰς τὴν τῆς ἀληθείας ζήτησιν καὶ εἶναι πρὸς τὴν ἀπόρρητον γνῶσιν ὁλκόν.
54. Proclus, *On Republic* 6.86.19–21. According to Lamberton (2012, 91) this passage testifies to the interchangeability of the terms εἰκὼν and σύμβολον; a similar argument is provided in Lamberton (2012, 85). See also Sheppard (1980, 91).
55. In the Section 257–77, Proclus elaborates a threefold distinction of poetry. Considering three conditions of the soul—the soul on the level of Gods, the soul focused on systematic knowledge, the lowest life of the soul based on imagination (φαντασία) and irrational perception (ἄλογοι αἰσθήσεις)—three kinds of poetry are presented: non mimetic poetry which is based on symbols—sometimes Proclus admits that images of intelligible παραδείγματα can be used; the poetry of virtues and rationality, still non-mimetic; the mimetic poetry, which is divided in accurately mimetic (εἰκαστικόν) and fantastic (φανταστικόν); see Sheppard (1980) and Lamberton (2012). Mimesis is strongly connected to ἀφομοίωσις (similarity). In fact, ‘it does not have pleasure as its goal but rather the accuracy of the representations – πρὸς τὸ παράδειγμα ἀφομοίωσιν’ (Proclus, *On the Republic* 6.191.3). In other words, the link between the copy and the paradigm is the basic rule of this poetry. By contrast, the nonresembling kind of poetry is based on copying not the reality in itself but as it appears (πρὸς τὸ φαινόμενον ὡς φαίνεται).

- As a result, the former kind of mimesis is comparable to the work of a painter who rightly imitates the model whereas the latter is a painter who looks at the appearance (Proclus, *On Republic* 6.191–2).
56. On the distinction between iconic–symbolic, see above notes 17, 26, and 28.
 57. Proclus, *On Republic* 6.81.14–21, Lambertson (trans.) (2012, 81).
 58. Well made artistic production is often connected to demiurgic production; see: *On Parmenides*. 4.840.20–30; *On Plato's Cratylus* LIII, 22.28–33, and LIII, 23.10–15. Proclus constantly emphasises the need to represent the intelligible model in the sensible artworks (whether artistic, poetic or demiurgic).
 59. Among the numerous works, see Roques (1954), Corsini (1962), Gersh (1978), Saffrey (1979), and Beierwaltes (1989, 2000).
 60. Lilla (1997 143–52) and Griffith (1997).
 61. See Carroll (1982, 1983).
 62. See Perl (2007, 30): ‘...the unparticipated God himself in whom all things participate, whereas Proclus distinguishes the immanent, participated terms from the transcendent, unparticipated term. But this difference is only apparent, for as we have seen, Proclus’ participated terms are nothing but the differentiated presence of the unitary unparticipated term in the participants. Dionysius’ “processions” are participated in that they are the differentiated presence of God in all things, but they are participated “unparticipatedly” in that, since the same God is differently present in different things, he is not confined to, or in that sense “possessed by” any of them’.
 63. Shaw (1999, 597). Being *intelligible* and *intellective*, the angels encompass all the Procline intelligible levels, whereas the ‘*ekklesia* assumes the divine status ascribed to the physical cosmos in pagan theurgy’ because ‘shifting the context to theurgy from the nature to an ecclesiastic world he necessarily changed the very nature of the “divine work”’; Shaw (1999, 597). As a matter of fact, symbols of Pseudo-Dionysian theurgy do not belong to the cosmos; rather, they are biblical images and sacramental symbols.
 64. *CH* II.2:165A; 17–18; *EH* III.iv:376C–D; 67.
 65. *EH* I.iii:376B; 67: ΟυσΙΑ γὰρ τῆς καθ’ ἡμᾶς ιεραρχίας ἐστὶ τὰ θεοπαράδοτα λόγια.
 66. *CH* II.2:140A–141C; 11–13. See Rorem (1984, 27–31) and Lilla (1982, 554–9).
 67. This distinction went unnoticed by scholars who focused on the exegetical and symbolical part of Pseudo-Dionysian works. As a consequence, the Procline origin of this difference and the previous opposition between an iconic and a symbolic method has also been disregarded.

68. See Van den Daele (1941, 51, 128).
69. Despite the reference made in *Ep. IX* 1:1108 A–B; 197–8, Pseudo-Dionysius never makes an explicit distinction between the two methods, even if he applies them to the hierarchies and their corresponding images and symbols (either liturgical or biblical). The reasons for this silence might be as follows: firstly, the mimetic framework and the symbolic framework pertain to different hierarchies and are developed in different treatises; secondly, the eastern liturgy, largely attested as a major source for Pseudo-Dionysius, has been recognised as mainly aimed to imitate the human–divine acts of Jesus; as a consequence, ecclesiastical hierarchy might be the only place where mimesis could find a proper place. Finally, as per a lexical recognition, it might be useful to explain why Pseudo-Dionysius applies mimetic–iconic to ‘symbols’ while the symbolic (Procline) method pertains to biblical images. Lampe (1961, 1282) points out that from the Cappadocian fathers onward, the term ‘symbol’ is definitely linked to liturgy whether it denotes sacraments or liturgical acts or ritual formulas. As a consequence, symbols are for Pseudo-Dionysius generally the sacraments, which therefore have necessarily mimetic features and an imitative role. Sacramental symbols (both actions and objects) are iconic–mimetic, while biblical images are dissimilar and non-resembling (as symbols were for Proclus). This is clearly a sign of the adherence to the previous Christian tradition, while at the same time using the categories of Proclus.
70. Rorem (1984, 66–9, 99–106). In the *Conclusions*, I consider the consequences of this anagogical conversion which should be interpreted as an *in-lifting* movement rather than a ‘up-lifting’ movement, as per Rorem’s definition.
71. The same goals of Proclus’ procession and return; see Beierwaltes (1989, 161–97).
72. Nasta (1997, 37–8) convincingly argues that the treatises *Celestial Hierarchy* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* were composed later than the *Divine Names*, *Mystical Theology*, and *Epistles*. See also Mainoldi (2018, 476–7).
73. *Ep. IX.1*:1104B; 193.
74. *Ep. IX.1*:1104C; 194.
75. *Ep. IX.1*:1105C; 196; Luijckheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 281).
76. Simplicity brings to gods, multiplicity to a childish imagination, as Proclus also stated in Proclus, *On Republic* 6.81.2.
77. *Ep. IX.1*:1105D; 197; Luijckheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 283): Ἀλλως τε καὶ τοῦτο ἐννοῆσαι χρή, τὸ διττὴν εἶναι τὴν τῶν θεολόγων παράδοσιν, τὴν μὲν ἀπόρρητον καὶ μυστικὴν, τὴν δὲ ἐμφανῆ καὶ γνωριμωτέραν, καὶ τὴν μὲν συμβολικὴν καὶ τελεστικὴν, τὴν δὲ

- φιλόσοφον καὶ ἀποδεικτικὴν· καὶ συμπέπλεκται τῷ ῥητῷ τὸ ἄρρητον. Καὶ τὸ μὲν πείθει καὶ καταδεῖται τῶν λεγομένων τὴν ἀλήθειαν, τὸ δὲ δρᾷ καὶ ἐνιδρύει τῷ θεῷ ταῖς ἀδιδάκτοις μυσταγωγίαις. See Hathaway (1969, 107–17) for the background of this passage to be found in Proclus.
78. Hathaway finds this bipartition in the works of Porphyrius, Iamblichus, and in the Platonic Theology of Proclus; see Hathaway (1969, 115). Nonetheless, the whole passage echoes Essay Six of the Commentary of Plato's Republic.
 79. *Ep.* IX.1:1108A–B; 197–8; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 283–4).
 80. Only Hathaway (1969, 116–20), recognises some lexical continuity between the commentary and the *Epistle IX*. For a summarised and direct comparison, see Table 2.1.
 81. Roques (1954, 145).
 82. Among all the terms, the following are the most significant. Scriptures can be ἱερογραφία (*CH* II.1:137A; 9; *CH* II.3:141A; 13; *CH* XV.1:328C; 51; *EH* III.iii:429D; 83) and εἰκονογραφία (*CH* II.1:137B; 10; *CH* II.2:140B; 11; *CH* II.5:145B; 15; *CH* XV.9:337D; 58; *EH* III.iii:429A; 82; *EH* IV.ix:481D; 102); it produces ἱεροπλαστίαι (*CH* II.3:137B; 10; *CH* II.3:141A; 13; *CH* II.5:145A; 16; *CH* XII.4:304D; 47); it can be a τυποπλαστία (*CH* XV.2:329A; 52) because it produces τύποι (*CH* II.2:140A; 11).
 83. Always referred to the distinction between the fragmentary human knowledge and the intelligible perfection and unity. It (ποικιλία) describes the complexity of biblical images (*CH* I.1:121B; 8; *CH* II.1:137A; 10; *CH* VII.2:208C; 28) and the variety of the sacraments (*CH* XV.1:328A; 50; *EH* I.iv:376B; 10).
 84. The biblical images are αἰσχροῦτης and αἰσχροῖα (*CH* II.2:140B:11; *CH* II.3:141A:13); ἀπεμφαινούσας (absurd) appears in this treatise alone (*CH* I.1:137B; 10; *CH* II.2:140B; 12; *CH* II.3:140C; 12; *CH* II.4:145A; 16; *CH* II.4:145B; 16; *CH* XV.8:337C; 58) and indicates the opinion of the many about biblical images, which is the method of dissimilarities; see Rorem (1984, 84).
 85. *CH* II.2:137B; 10; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 148).
 86. *CH* II.2:137B; 10; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 148).
 87. *CH* II.2:140A; 11; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 149): ‘But the research of the truth (ἡ τῆς ἀληθείας ζήτησις), the sacred wisdom of scripture becomes evident, for, when, the heavenly intelligences are represented with forms, great providential care is taken to offer no insult to divine powers, as one might say, and we ourselves are spared a passionate dependence upon images which have something of the lowly and vulgar about them’.

88. *CH* II.2:140B–C; 11–12; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 149):
 Εἰ δὲ τὰς ἀπεμφαινούσας εἰκονογραφίας αἰτιάσοιτό τις αἰδεῖσθαι
 λέγων ἀνατιθέναι τὰ οὕτως αἰσχρὰ μορφώματα ταῖς θεοειδέσι καὶ
 ἀγνωτάταις διακοσμήσεσιν, ἀπόχρη πρὸς αὐτὸν εἰπεῖν ὡς διττός
 ἐστὶ τῆς ἱερᾶς ἐκφαντορίας ὁ τρόπος: ὁ μὲν ὡς εἰκὸς διὰ τῶν ὁμοίων
 προῖόν ἱεροτύπων εἰκόνων, ὁ δὲ διὰ τῶν ἀνομοίων μορφοποιῶν εἰς τὸ
 παντελῶς ἀπεικὸς καὶ ἀπεμφαῖνον πλαττόμενος. The first method is
 used in *CH* alone while the second appears in *EH*.
89. Pepin (1975), Rorem (1984, 90), and Beierwaltes (1989, 365–9).
 The oxymoron, ‘dissimilar similarity’ (or, unlike likeness) would be
 the union of the Procline ὁμοιος and ἀνόμοιος, discussed both in
The Element of Theology (28, 29) and in the *Commentary On Plato’s
 Parmenides* VII:1192–3, 1199. In these treatises, Proclus describes the
 relationship between God and the beings through similarity (all beings
 are similar to their cause) and dissimilarity (the cause is always dissim-
 ilar to the effects). On one hand, Pseudo-Dionysius recalls this very
 closely in *DN* IX.6:913C and *DN* IX.6–7:916A, where the opposite
 pair ὁμοιος and ἀνόμοιος is analysed referring to the divine names of
 ταυτότης–ἐτερότης; see Corsini (1962, 97). On the other hand, Proclus
 explains that these two pairs are not the same; while identity–differ-
 ence refers to the intelligible realm, similarity–dissimilarity applies to
 material world; Corsini (1962, 151). In addition, some remarks need
 to be added: first of all, the expression ‘dissimilar similarity’ appears
 only in *CH* II.2:137D–140A; 10–12; *CH* II.3:141C; *CH* II.4:144A;
CH II.5:145A; *CH* XV.8:337B; secondly, it always applies to bibli-
 cal images rather than to the relationship between causes and effects;
 finally, it appears in the chapters where the exegetical method is exposed
 (the second and fifteenth). I argue that this new formula is created
 through the use of the ἀνόμοιος μιμούμενοι employed by Proclus in
 the *Commentary on Plato’s Republic*, see note 35. In fact, the reduction
 to one of the two moments—similarity and dissimilarity—is original to
 Pseudo-Dionysius; see Corsini (1962, 121, 165).
90. *Essays* 5 and 6, as discussed above.
91. *CH* II.3:141A–C:13; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 150).
92. See *CH* II.5:145A–B; 15–16.
93. This expression appears only in *CH*, in those chapters which deal with
 the biblical exegesis only: *CH* II.2:137D–140A; *CH* II.3:141C; *CH*
 II.4:144A; *CH* II.5:145A; *CH* XV.8:337B.
94. *EH* I.v:376D; 67.
95. Bychkov (2012, 40).
96. Lampe (1961, 1282).

97. And also the second method stated in *CH* II.2:140B–C; 11–12: ὁ μὲν ὡς εἰκὸς διὰ τῶν ὁμοίων προῶν ἱεροτύπων εἰκόνων.
98. van den Daele (1941).
99. *CH* I.3:121C; 8; see also *CH* VIII.2:241; 35.
100. *EH* III.3:428A–C; 81–2. We translate τῶν ἀρχετύπων κάλλος as ‘the beauty of the archetypes’ instead of Rorem’s translation, ‘original beauty’; see Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 212).
101. The movement from effects to causes and from liturgical actions and images to their archetypes, are also connected by Jesus; see *EH* I.ii:428C; 82; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987): Ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ὡς ἔφην ἐπὶ τὰ τῶν ἀδύτων προτύλαια καλῶς διαγεγραμμένα τοῖς ἀτελέσιν ἔτι πρὸς θεωρίαν αὐτάρκη καταλιπόντες εἰσέλθωμεν ἀπὸ τῶν αἰτιατῶν εἰς τὰ αἷτια κατὰ τὴν ἱερὰν ἡμῶν σύναξιν, καὶ τὴν εὐπρεπῆ τῶν νοητῶν Ἰησοῦ φωταγωγοῦντος ὁψόμεθα θεωρίαν τὸ μακάριον ἀποστίλβουσαν ἐμφανῶς τῶν ἀρχετύπων κάλλος.
102. *EH* I.ii:428C; 82; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 212).
103. See Golitzin (1994b, 150). The order of bishops is as mimetic (*CH* I, 2:121C; 8) as the whole ecclesiastical hierarchy (*EH* XII.ii:293A; 43; IV.ii:476C; 97; V.v:505B; 107).
104. *EH* III.iv:429A; 82. The space of the Church which we are referring to is the place where all the liturgical acts have place, that is, the one situated from the doors to the altar and vice versa. Baptism, Eucharist, and Holy Chrism are a progression from outside of the gates to the central mystery, the altar, which represents Jesus Christ. The descriptions of the priestly ranks and laity derive from the same altar; see Golitzin (1994a, 185–6). This is the ‘new’ ecclesiastical space set out by Pseudo-Dionysius in terms of procession from the unity to the many and the conversion from the many to the unity.
105. *EH* III.iii:429A–B; 82–3; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 212–3): Ὡσαύτως ἡ θεία τῆς συνάξεως τελετή, κἂν ἐνιαίαν καὶ ἀπλὴν ἔχουσα καὶ συνεπτυγμένην ἀρχὴν εἰς τὴν ἱερὰν ποικιλίαν τῶν συμβόλων φιλανθρώπως πληθύνεται καὶ μέχρι πάσης χωρῆς τῆς ἱεραρχικῆς εἰκονογραφίας.
106. *EH* III, 3.429B:83; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 213): καὶ τὴν εἰς τὸ ἐν ἑαυτοῦ νοεράν ποιησάμενος εἰσοδὸν ὁρᾷ καθαρῶς τοὺς τῶν τελοῦ– μένων ἐνοεῖδεις λόγους τῆς ἐπὶ τὰ δεῦτερα φιλανθρώπου προόδου τὸ πέρας τὴν εἰς τὰ πρῶτα θειοτέραν ἐπιστροφὴν ποιούμενος.
107. *EH* IV.i:473B; 95–6; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 226) who instead translate this as ‘lovely imitation’.
108. *EH* IV.i:473B; 96; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 226).
109. *EH* IV.i:473C–D; 96; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 225).
110. *EH* IV.i:473D–476A; 96; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 226).

111. *EH* IV.ii:476B–C; 97: εἰς τὸ τοῖς ἀνομοίοις ἄχραντον ὑπὸ πτερωτοῖς αἰνίγμασι συγκαλύπτεται.
112. See above, notes 16, 20, 55.
113. Proclus, *On Timaeus* 1.29.31–30.19.
114. Biblical images and liturgical actions belong to the hierarchical world which is clearly distinguished from the thearchic domain. It is important to recall this distinction in order to draw a line between the Neoplatonic emanantistic cosmos and the immediate divine action proposed by Pseudo-Dionysius' monotheism; see Mainoldi (2017, 203–5).
115. Sheppard (1980, 91) and Lamberton (2012, 85). Symbol is mostly quoted in *EH* because of the sacraments.
116. Rorem (1984, 22) underlines that this is 'not simply a treatise on the angels in general, but rather a presentation of their description in the Bible'.
117. The new exegetical way that Pseudo-Dionysius elaborates seems to avoid both the Antiochian literalism and the Alexandrian allegorical exegesis. This aspect needs to be looked at in a greater depth.
118. 'Ecclesiastical Hierarchy recapitulates the saving acts of Christ, realizes the Incarnation and anticipates the *eschaton*' (Golitzin 1994a, 353): this is the deepest bond between Pseudo-Dionysius' liturgy and the mystagogic eastern tradition.
119. This understanding of the liturgy was already developed in Ephrem Syrus' speculation and the *Liber Graduum*; see Golitzin (1994a, 359–74).
120. Golitzin (1994a, 354).
121. Rico Pavés demonstrates that only in *EH* is divinisation accessed and only because of the sacraments is it made possible for believers; see Pavés (2001, 85–104). I suggest that only mimetic symbols, that is, sacraments which are based on their inner models, lead to divinisation.
122. Golitzin (1994b, 150). The Pseudo-Dionysian concept of the Church shares two main features with Proclus' educative poetry and mimetic way: first, mimetic images intend to be educative for the souls considering the mimetic calling of the souls. Indeed, both Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius employ the example of the painter to explain how demiurges (or poets) and bishops shape the material world looking at the intelligible. Theologians in the eighth century kept in mind both these aspects.
123. In *EH* IV.ii:428C; 82, the role of the archetype is linked to the role of Jesus. Perhaps the need to distance his own theology from such heresies as Origenism also played an important role.

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Pseudo-Dionysius and the Importance of Sensible Things

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In addition to his contributions to mystical theology, philosophy of language, soteriology, and the meeting of Neoplatonic and Christian elements, Dionysius the Areopagite became an essential source of medieval aesthetics. His ideas on images, symbols and materiality, which go beyond philosophical and theological discourse, found their expression in medieval Christian visual culture, such as in the veneration of icons and in the arrangement of church architecture. The idea that the sacraments are material images of the divine mystery and that sensible things are ‘echoes’ of wisdom are some of the most influential features of the Areopagite’s highly aestheticised thought.

According to Dionysius, two main characteristics of the Divinity are transcendence, by which God is absolutely unknown, and immanence, by which he is present in the world. The task to reconcile this tension between God’s unknowability and his presence in the created world is

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operated through a twofold movement: God's descent, motivated by grace, and humanity's ascent towards God. God reveals himself to humans, and human beings acquire knowledge of God as the Cause of everything. At the same time, God is 'known in all things and as distinct from all things'. Furthermore, 'He is known through knowledge and through unknowing, [...] of him there is conception, reason, understanding, touch, perception, opinion, imagination, name, and many other things'.¹ The Cause is, so to say, touched and sensed in its effects and through its effects. Human beings know through senses. The human mind, moving from effects to causes, is capable of reaching a partial, but real, understanding that the 'divine Wisdom is the source, the cause, the substance, the perfection, the protector, and the goal'.²

Thus, we do not know only through our 'noetic' function, but also through the senses: 'But also sense-perceptions themselves are echoes of wisdom'.³ As a matter of fact, according to the Areopagite, we do not know God away or apart from the senses, but precisely through them. Speaking of light and divine rays, Dionysius affirms that the divine ray 'can enlighten us only by being upliftingly concealed in a variety of sacred veils which the Providence of the Father adapts to our nature as human beings'.⁴

These veils actually express God's love for human beings—they represent a concession to our imperfect nature and our mode of conceiving things. These veils are identified with appearances of beauty, odours, light, and the Eucharist:

Hence, any thinking person realises that the appearances of beauty are signs of an invisible loveliness. The beautiful odors which strike the senses are representations of a conceptual diffusion. Material lights are images of the outpouring of an immaterial gift of light (...) The reception of the most divine Eucharist is a symbol of participation in Jesus. And so it goes for all the gifts transcendently received by the beings of heaven, gifts which are granted to us in a symbolic mode.⁵

The Eucharist is a symbol of participation in Jesus, and so 'the source of spiritual perfection provided us with perceptible images of those heavenly minds',⁶ which happens out of his concern for us. It represents a concession to our imperfect nature, which has the task to become more perfect and more godlike. What is important to note is that Dionysius' 'image' does not describe some kind of shadowy imitation of the ideal, but has an ontological value, as it reveals the ideal and is a real presence.⁷ That is why Dionysius is not interested in the artistic aspects of images or their aesthetic conceptions. For him, the purpose of images, symbols,

and aesthetic objects, is anagogy, ascent (and not artistic pleasure), that is, the uplifting of the mind in a manner suitable to it.⁸

Humans, as composite being, hold an eminent place in creation and are gifted with both conceptual and sensible perception. As such, the link between the soul and the body is not broken even after death, because that would mean dissolution of being. On the contrary, Dionysius says that the human being is deified not only by the soul, but by both body and soul.⁹ In his own words:

Among the unholy there are some who ridiculously believe that our bodies experience a dissolution of being. Others think that the link of body and soul is broken forever since, as they imagine, it would be inappropriate for souls to be trammelled with a body in the midst of the godlike life and blessedness. Such people, because of their inadequate acquaintance with divine understanding [ἐπιστήμη], overlook the fact that Christ has already provided the example of a human life conforming perfectly to God... No sacred men will ever fall into such error, for they know that their whole being will be granted the peace which will make them Christlike.¹⁰

The positive appreciation of matter/body stems naturally from the idea that God, originator of all beauty, is the creator of composite human beings.¹¹ However, true beauty is hidden beauty; it is beyond understanding, and it is safeguarded from profanation. In the same time as it is hidden, it is also revealed, and when it appears, it does so in appropriate images:

They reveal themselves solely to minds capable of grasping them. They shine within our souls only by way of appropriate images [ὑπαρραφθάρτους εἰκόνας], images which, like themselves, have the virtue of being incorruptible. Hence virtuous conformity to God [τὸ γὰρ τῆς θεοειδοῦς ἀρετῆς] can only appear as an authentic image [ἄγαλμα] of its object when it rivets its attention on that conceptual and fragrant beauty [νοητὸν καὶ εὐὼδες ἀφορῶν κάλλος]. On this condition – and only on this condition – can the soul impress itself and reproduce within itself an imitation of loveliness [κάλλιστον μίμημα].¹²

Three important things are to be noted here. First, hidden, transcendent beauty is always revealed in appropriate images. Second, even those revealed images cannot be grasped by everyone, but only by those capable of doing so. Thirdly, the only way that the soul can imitate the

divine beauty is constantly to look to the archetype, to the transcendent beauty.¹³ This concentration enables sacred men to produce the likeness of God, and in doing so, they ‘never cease to shape the power of their minds along the lines of a loveliness which is conceptual, transcendent, and fragrant (ὑπερουσίως εὐῶδη καὶ νοητὴ εὐπρέπειαν)’.¹⁴ This capability seems to be not only ontological, but also ethical—it is not ‘just’ an imitation of God, but it is the ‘virtuous conformity to God’ (τὸ τῆς θεοειδοῦς ἀρετῆς).¹⁵

The close connection of aesthetics and ethics is exemplified in Dionysius’ description and interpretation of sacred rites, as, for example, baptism. During the rite of baptism, the candidate stands before the hierarchy and, upon being questioned why he has come, he ‘repudiates his ungodliness, his lack of knowledge of the truly beautiful, and the absence within himself of a God-possessed life’.¹⁶ A few lines later, in the ‘Theory’, Dionysius explains that this rite is ‘symbolising the sacred divine birth’, and that it reflects enigmas contemplated in God ‘by way of natural reflection suited to the human intellect’.¹⁷ This means that through this divine birth, the initiate ‘learns’ about true beauty, he becomes able to grasp it and to understand it. In addition, the beauty of the perceptible images present during the rite in fact reflects the divine beauty, as they are appropriate to our nature. Baptism itself is a reflection of beauty, as it is harmonious in its arrangement, order, and proportion.¹⁸ The initiate is summoned to a sacred contest, a combat, under the auspices of Christ himself, who, as Goodness gives the initiate support, as Wisdom provides the rules, and as Beauty is the prize for the winners.¹⁹ Baptism is, therefore, the prerequisite for being able to contemplate divine beauty.²⁰

Sacred rites have a splendid and beautiful exterior appearance, under which the true beauty is hidden, accessible only to ‘people of intelligence’.²¹ The rites are, therefore, images of beauty, and everything in them is an image of beauty:

We, however, when we think of the sacred synaxis must move in from effects to causes and in the light which Jesus will give us, we will be able to glimpse the contemplation of the conceptual things clearly reflecting a blessed original beauty [τῶν ἀρχετύπων κάλλος]. And you, O most divine and sacred sacrament: Lift up the symbolic garments of enigmas which surround you. Show yourself clearly to our gaze. Fill the eyes of our mind with a unifying and unveiled light.²²

The archetypal beauty lies in the sacraments, within the hierarchy, which are the manifestations of something beyond our reality, something that we need to discover under 'a unifying and unveiled light'. Beauty, then, 'appears in every manifestation of the unmanifest', and thus it represents 'the sacredness of everything apparently profane'.²³ Everything profane (or sensible), then, is sacred due to the beauty that manifests the unmanifest.

Images of transcendent beauty and their role in the imitation of God are, in fact, a sign of God's intention to facilitate human perception of the revelation. As previously noted, 'sacred' veils are a concession to composite human nature. They have both pedagogical and anagogical significance; they not only attenuate the light that irradiates from the divine principle, making it perceptible to human eyes, but they also incite humans to go beyond mere exterior perception.²⁴

As a matter of fact, there are two types of symbols that designate the divinity: they can work 'firstly, by proceeding naturally through sacred images in which like represents like, or also using formations which are dissimilar and even entirely inadequate and ridiculous'. The first 'sacred shapes' (or images) are particularly dangerous, because they can deceive humans and induce them to interpret these images literally, and here stands the danger of idolatry. That is why Dionysius prefers the second type of symbols:

Since the way of negation appears to be more suitable to the realm of the divine and since positive affirmations are always unfitting to the hiddenness of the inexpressible, a manifestation through dissimilar shapes is more correctly to be applied to the invisible. So it is that scriptural writings, far from demeaning the ranks of heaven, actually pay them honor by describing them with dissimilar shapes so completely at variance with what they really are that we come to discover how those ranks, so far removed from us, transcend all materiality. Furthermore, I doubt that anyone would refuse to acknowledge that incongruities are more suitable for lifting our minds up into the domain of the spiritual than similarities are. High-flown shapes could well mislead someone into thinking that the heavenly beings are golden or gleaming men, glamorous, wearing lustrous clothing, giving off flames which cause no harm, or that they have other similar beauties with which the word of God has fashioned the heavenly minds. It was to avoid this kind of misunderstanding among those incapable of rising above visible beauty that the pious theologians so wisely and upliftingly stooped to incongruous dissimilarities, for by doing this they took account of our

inherent tendency toward the material and our willingness to be lazily satisfied by base images. At the same time they enabled that part of the soul which longs for the things above actually to rise up. Indeed the sheer crassness of the signs is a goad so that even the materially inclined cannot accept that it could be permitted or true that the celestial and divine sights could be conveyed by such shameful things.²⁵

It is necessary, therefore, to learn to interpret the dissimilar similarities and to transfer the attributes from the lower realm of senses to the higher celestial realm.²⁶ Interpreting the attributes in the right key makes it possible for the Scripture to use a variety of symbols, otherwise inadequate, in order to describe celestial beings. Dionysius himself gives a personal testimony of the disturbing inadequacy of certain Biblical symbols, which incited him to go beyond mere perception:

And I myself might not have been stirred from this difficulty to my current inquiry, to an uplifting through a precise explanation of these sacred truths, had I not been troubled by the deformed imagery used by scripture in regard to the angels. My mind was not permitted to dwell on imagery so inadequate, but was provoked to get behind the material show, to get accustomed to the idea of going beyond appearances to those upliftings which are not of this world.²⁷

The preference for dissimilar ‘types of the typeless’ is quite understandable: inadequate and absurd images cannot be accepted as such, they require interpretation and explanation. When used to interpreting such symbols, one can be safe from interpreting less astonishing representations in a literal way.²⁸

Dionysius’ ideas on the importance of sensible things, material objects as echoes of wisdom, and the positive appreciation of matter greatly influenced later Christian philosophy and theology. Among the most prominent examples are the intellectual debates sparked during the iconoclastic controversy in Byzantium. The Areopagite’s thoughts were embraced by the defenders of icons, who argued for the pedagogical and anagogical role of icons and distinguished between the image and the prototype, claiming that the respect given to the icon is in fact respect for its prototype.²⁹ Thus, for example, John Damascene, one of the famous iconodules, conceives the icon as an educational instrument useful for the communication with the divine: ‘What the book does for those who understand letters, the image does for the illiterate’.³⁰ And again:

Every image makes manifest and demonstrates something hidden. For example, because human beings do not have direct knowledge of what is invisible, since their souls are veiled by bodies, or [knowledge] of future events, or of things distant and removed in space, since they are circumscribed by space and time, the image was devised to guide us to knowledge and to make manifest and open what is hidden, certainly for our profit and well-doing and salvation, so that, as we learn what is hidden from things recorded and noised abroad, we are filled with desire and zeal for what is good, and avoid and hate the opposite, that is, what is evil.³¹

This is precisely what Dionysius has in mind when he speaks of ‘material instruments capable of guiding us’,³² as well as when he explains that God revealed the angelic hierarchy to us ‘in the sacred pictures of the scriptures so that he might lift us in spirit up through the perceptible to the conceptual, from sacred shapes and symbols to the simple peaks of the hierarchies of heaven’.³³

The Council of Nicaea, held in 787, which condemned iconoclastic practices, explicitly cites Dionysius’ works twice. When the definition of the iconoclast council was read, followed by a confutation, John the deacon said: ‘Oh, would that, as they have in their commencement made use of the paternal voice of the hierophant Dionysius, they had preserved inviolate those traditions which he in common with the rest of the holy fathers held’.³⁴ However, despite John’s declaration, it is not possible to identify the exact passage from the *Corpus Dionysiacum* the iconoclastic council quoted.

The second quotation of Dionysius refers to a passage from *The Divine Names*:

Well would it have been for them had they been acquainted with the words of the God-fearing Dionysius as found in his discourse on the Hierarchy – ‘The resemblance of effects to their causes is not absolutely complete; for though the effects have an impress corresponding to their causes, yet the causes themselves are superior to the effects caused by them, and they are more important in proportion to the ratio of their own original’.³⁵

Besides these direct citations from Dionysius, one can detect the implicit presence of the Areopagite in the definition of the council. For example, in claiming that the more icons are looked at, the more those who look at them are uplifted to the memory and desire of the prototypes,

the council followed Dionysius' path and the pedagogical and anagogical purpose that he ascribes to symbols. The icon is nothing but an image that represents a likeness of the prototype, which makes the icon venerable and saintly.³⁶

CONCLUSIONS

Our brief discussion has shown how important material objects are for Dionysius, which is significant not only on its own merits, but also because it sheds more light on the often accentuated 'darkness' of Byzantine theological and philosophical thought and corrects the notion that early Christians saw the body in an overly Platonic way, as the prison of the soul, or the Earth as the worthless copy of the celestial world.³⁷ Dionysius' insistence on 'sacred veils', 'dissimilar similarities', and other images of an invisible beauty contributes to the explanation of Byzantine mystical ecclesiology and soteriology.³⁸ The anagogical and pedagogical value of symbols as concessions to the composite nature of humans led Paul Rorem to conclude that, in the Dionysian corpus, 'biblical and liturgical symbols not only may be used but must be used'.³⁹ Whether such a claim is an overstatement or not, it confirms how pregnant with symbolism and 'materiality' the Areopagite's works are. It is no wonder, then, that these writings deeply influenced one of the most dramatic events in Christian history, namely the iconoclastic crisis, which saw the defenders of icons using Dionysius' highly aestheticised language and cosmological and ecclesiological interpretation as key arguments for their position. Last, but not the least, Dionysius' view of the body and the material world as beautiful, that is, as glimpses of the transcendent beauty of God and signs of his immanence in the world, might become highly valuable for our own contemporary understanding and better appreciation of ourselves and of the world in which we live, thus justifying indeed the increasing attention that Dionysius has been attracting in today's philosophy and theology.

NOTES

1. *DN*VII.3:872A; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 108–9) (italics mine).
2. *DN* VII.2:868B–C; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 107).
3. *Ibid.*
4. *CH*I.2:121B–C; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 146).
5. *CH*I.3:121D–124A; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 146).

6. *CH* I.3:124A; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 147).
7. Golitzin (1994, 127).
8. *CH* II.1:137B; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 148).
9. Specifically on this, see Golitzin (1990).
10. *EH* VII.i.2:553C–D; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 250).
11. Ivanović (2014).
12. *EH* IV.iii.1:473B; 96, 1–5; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 225).
13. Dionysius here uses an artist as example—he always keeps eye on the original and does not allow anything else to distract him (*EH* IV.iii.1:473C).
14. *Ibid.*
15. Ivanović (2018).
16. *EH* II.ii.5:393D–396A; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 202).
17. *EH* II.iii.1:397A; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 204).
18. *EH* II.iii.3:400B.
19. *EH* II.iii.6:401D–404A.
20. This is the liturgical prerequisite that, together with the mystical prerequisite, makes the contemplation of beauty possible. See Andia (2006, 100).
21. *EH* IV.iii.2:476B; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 226).
22. *EH* III.iii.2:428C; 82, 7–12; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 212).
23. Balthasar (1984, 166).
24. Barasch (1995, 175).
25. *CH* II.3:141A–C; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 150).
26. Bychkov (1983, 147).
27. *CH* II.5:145B; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 153).
28. On the interpretation of symbols and different movements of the soul (circular, spiral, and linear, the latter being anagogical), see Ivanović (2014, 195–6).
29. Ivanović (2010, 62ff.).
30. John of Damascus, *Oratio* I.17, PTS 17:93; Louth (trans.) (2003, 31).
31. John of Damascus, *Oratio* III.17, PTS 17:126; Louth (trans.) (2003, 96).
32. *CH* I.3:121D; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 146).
33. *CH* I.3:124A; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 146).
34. Mansi XIII, 212A; ACO, II, 3.3, 610.
35. Mansi XIII, 253E; ACO, II, 3.3, 660–2. Although the *Refutatio* mentions that the passage comes from the *Hierarchies*, it is in fact from *DN* II.8.645C. Another passage seems to be a paraphrase that expresses the same idea, i.e. *DN* IV.6:913C–D; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 117–18): ‘Now while God is called “same” to indicate that he is totally, uniquely, and undividedly like himself, he is also described as “similar” and this is a divine name which we must not reject. The theologians say that the transcendent God is inherently similar to no other being, but that he also bestows a similarity to himself on all those who are returning

to him in imitation as far as possible, of what is beyond all definition and understanding. It is the power of the divine similarity which returns all created things towards their Cause, and these things must be reckoned to be similar to God by reason of the divine image and likeness. But we cannot say that God is similar to them, any more than we can say that man is similar to his own portrait. Things on the same level may be similar to one another with the result that similarity can be predicated of either of them. And they can be similar to each other through the workings of a prior form of similarity which they share. But an interchange of this sort cannot be admitted in regard to Cause and effects, for God does not grant similarity merely to some objects⁷.

36. See a more detailed discussion on Dionysius' influence on the defenders of icons in Ivanović (2010, 62–87).
37. A fuller discussion can be found in Ivanović (2019).
38. These ideas found their application in architecture, both East and West. See Bogdanović (2011).
39. Rorem (1984, 105).

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The Relation of Monks to Clergy in the Dionysian Hierarchy and Its Byzantine Reception

Evgenios Iverites

The writings attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite have, from the time of their composition, exerted a strong influence on eastern Christian monastic writers.¹ According to Alexander Golitzin, the most prolific scholar of this aspect of Dionysian reception, the *Corpus Dionysiacum* appealed to monks by its incorporation of earlier monastic expositions of liturgical symbolism and mystical experience into an integral vision of the cosmos as a harmonious whole, ordered by the providential love of God. This vision is recapitulated and symbolised in the scriptural images and liturgical rituals of the Christian church, which are properly interpreted and expounded only by ascetically purified and illumined human minds.

Golitzin has attributed his understanding of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* and its subsequent reception history in the Christian East to his experience living in the Athonite monastery of Simonopetra in the late 1970s. Two features of that experience stood out: ‘first, the as it were “architecture” of the monastic life of personal and corporate prayer and, second,

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the phenomenon of the ascetic holy man'.² The tensions and contradictions that most modern scholars have seen in the Dionysian interpretation of world and Church faded away in the unhurried rhythms of a monastery where all the elements of the Dionysian system found their harmonious place.³

Outside the idyllic setting of the cloister, however, these tensions re-emerge. One of the most controversial elements of the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite is hierarchy, the structuring of the universe in orders of beings who differ in their degree of purification from vice and ignorance, illumination by the divine light, and assimilation to divine perfection. Hierarchy is the means by which God, who utterly transcends all created things, is nevertheless immanent to all created things in their diversity, being partaken of by each of them according to its own proper measure. In contrast to the modern connotations of the term 'hierarchy,' the Dionysian version is supposed to be dynamic, with superior beings lovingly conveying their own purity, illumination, and perfection to inferior ones, as all together draw nearer to God.⁴ Despite this positive intent, however, the rigidity with which Dionysius differentiates each order has proved problematic, even for sympathetic readers, on the grounds that it obscures the directness of the mediation of salvation by Christ, or that it overlooks the messy reality of the institutional church.⁵

The place of monastics vis-à-vis clergy—especially the bishop—in the Dionysian conception of hierarchy is a particular instance of this problem. As Karl Holl pointed out long ago, by assigning monks a specific place in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, Dionysius honoured them with sacramental affirmation of their asceticism, but in the process confirmed their subjection to clerical control.⁶ This clericocentric option conflicted with a widespread view that saw monks as recipients of special charisms of wisdom and miracle-working from God as a result of their austere way of life. Such ascetical virtue might even trump the sacramental role of the clergy as the chief means of communication with God.⁷ The tensions between these views were (and remain) a recurrent problem in Byzantine and post-Byzantine monastic history.⁸

Golitzin, himself now a bishop, has frequently emphasised the contrast between 'monastic' and 'episcopal' reception of Dionysius' thought in the Greek East. The crux of contention is the Areopagite's presentation of bishops (as well as other clergy) as holy and enlightened virtually *ex officio*—an idea presumably congenial to bishops, but not to monks engaged in strenuous ascetic endeavour.⁹ Though noting Dionysius'

‘persistent ... effort to assimilate the figure of the ascetical holy man to that of the bishop’, he judges this to be ‘an obvious sin against truth’, which later monastic theologians ‘charitably ... ignore’. For their part, he criticises bishops for applauding it, ‘while ... ignoring ... the inner reading of “hierarchy” and “hierarchy” ... the application ... of these terms to the life of the soul’.¹⁰

Golitzin notes that such tensions are inherent in the life of the Church in the present imperfect age; they constitute an ‘antinomy’ that cannot be fully resolved before the eschaton. Since the ecclesiastical hierarchy serves as an earthly icon of the pristine celestial order, it must be imperfect and mutable, allowing for the fluidity of spiritual progress and regress, until all antinomies are fully resolved in the eschaton.¹¹ Nevertheless, Dionysius is charged with ‘failure to distinguish clearly the function of this icon as the present communication of grace from its role as pointer to a future, eschatological reality’.¹²

Golitzin’s work is groundbreaking in drawing attention to the living ascetical context in which Dionysius has been read and venerated through the many centuries of Byzantine Orthodox tradition. Yet he has missed a persistent tendency within that tradition to seek to reconcile the two ideals of monk and bishop, going beyond a one-sidedly ‘monastic’ or ‘episcopal’ reading.¹³ Furthermore, his deployment of the concept of icon to help clarify Dionysian thought is fruitful (and goes with the grain of said thought), yet he construes the nature of icons too narrowly. While the contrast he draws between present fallibility and future perfection is both pertinent and poignant, the Byzantine tradition tends to be more synthetic, expressing through the icon a kind of ‘realised eschatology’, to use a term borrowed by Golitzin from modern theological vocabulary: that is, it perceives the first fruits of the kingdom of God already present in this age, in the living images of holy men and women.

To illustrate this alternative line of interpretation, I take a cue from Golitzin’s experience at Simonopetra and turn to a particular icon and its use in ‘the ‘architecture’ of monastic life’ in another Athonite cloister. The apse of the refectory of Iveron Monastery was recently painted with frescoes of various great Fathers of the Church, all bishops, clothed in the monastic habit and holding scrolls with quotations related, literally or allegorically, to the main action that takes place in a refectory, eating (Fig. 4.1).¹⁴ On the far left stands Dionysius the Areopagite (Fig. 4.2). His scroll quotes from the introduction to the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*:



Fig. 4.1 *Platytéra*, Mystical Supper, and episcopal Church Fathers in monastic habit, with Dionysius first from left in lowest register, Mount Athos, Iveron Monastery, refectory, western apse, wall painting (*Photo credit* Evgenios Iverites)

[The common end of the hierarchy for all is ...] the banquet of beholding the One himself inasmuch as possible, which nourishes noetically and deifies every one who stretches up toward it.¹⁵

The frescoes in the Iveron refectory follow an iconographic programme, originating in the late Byzantine period, in which great episcopal fathers of the church were depicted in monastic garb. These depictions are found in the west end of the church or in the apse of the refectory, where senior monks or visiting bishops and other dignitaries are seated during meals after the Eucharistic liturgy on feast days.¹⁶ When the refectory is sited opposite the church, on the same axis, as is common in traditional Orthodox monastic architecture, this means that the depiction at the easternmost point of the axis, around the altar in the apse of the sanctuary, of sainted bishops wearing liturgical vestments and holding scrolls with liturgical quotations, is matched by their depiction at the westernmost point of the axis, in the apse of the refectory, wearing

Fig. 4.2 Dionysius the Areopagite holding a scroll with a quotation from the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, detail of Fig. 4.2 (Photo credit Evgenios Iverites)



the monastic habit and holding scrolls with ascetical exhortations. The ideal of combining the two aspects of holiness, clerical and monastic, in the person of the bishop, is thus ingeniously written into the architectural and iconographic fabric of the monastery.¹⁷

The existence of such an iconographic programme suggests a richer understanding of the relation between monastic asceticism and episcopal authority than Golitzin's analysis allows, and, concomitantly, of a different understanding of the nature of the icon. Prominently displayed images tend to be potent symbols in most cultures, and especially in that of iconophilic Byzantium and its successors. Iconic symbols bring together different meanings, often in spite of tensions and contradictions that might inhere in more discursive articulations of those meanings.¹⁸ Yet the two should not be separated too categorically, since discourse often operates through evoking images, in a kind of 'visual thinking'. Dionysius the Areopagite himself was a key figure in the development of a sophisticated Byzantine theory of images that encompassed both physical images (i.e. icons) and conceptual images (i.e. visual thinking), with an emphasis on their polyvalence and suitability or unsuitability in different contexts, including ritual (i.e. liturgical) celebration. The iconographic program involving monk-bishops, found in whole or in part at Iveron and other prominent Orthodox churches and monasteries, broadcasts the symbol of the holy ascetic bishop through its visual power and its implication in liturgical use of architectural space. It participates in a centuries-long meditation on the proper place of monastics and clergy in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

To trace in detail the genealogy of this iconographic programme through all these centuries would take me well beyond the proper limits of this paper and of my competence, thus violating the principle, so beloved of Dionysius, of keeping to one's proper order and measure.¹⁹ Instead, the icon can serve as a prompt to investigate the understanding of the relation of monastic life to hierarchical authority in the Byzantine tradition of the Areopagite *Corpus*, focusing on a close reading of Dionysius himself and his earliest reception in the Greek East. In what follows, then, I will discuss the actual teaching of Dionysius, with its various points of tension and nuance, and then present three of the earliest reactions to it. The first two, by the bishop John of Scythopolis, writing soon after the early sixth-century appearance of the Areopagite corpus, and by the monk Antiochus of Mar Saba in the early seventh century, are of interest not for profundity of thought, but as interpretations and adjustments that illustrate how Dionysius was fitted into the theological worldview of more 'average' Byzantine theologians. The third, by Maximus the Confessor, a contemporary of Antiochus, is more weighty and will consequently take up more space. It is also notable for

its greater engagement with Dionysius' use of the concept of 'image'. In the conclusion I will place this focused study of the early reception of the Areopagite back in the larger stream of Byzantine thought on the relationship of asceticism to authority, springing from the predecessors of Dionysius and flowing back to the future in the iconographic manifestation of contemporary Athonite revival.

DIONYSIUS HIMSELF ON MONKS

Dionysius mentions or alludes to monks in several places in his corpus.²⁰ But two passages are the main points of reference for monks vis-à-vis hierarchy: Chapter 6 of *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, which describes the rank of monastics within the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the rite of their consecration, and *Epistle* 8, to Demophilus, an overzealous monk whom Dionysius censures for upsetting the hierarchy.²¹

The ecclesiastical hierarchy consists of three triads, the highest comprising the major sacraments themselves (baptism, Eucharist, *myron*).²² Of the two consisting of human beings, the higher one comprises clergy, the initiators, while the lower consists of laypeople, the initiated. The clerical triad is further subdivided into hierarchs (bishops), priests, and ministers (deacons). In the lay triad, the lowest order consists of people undergoing various forms of purification—catechumens, demoniacs, penitents—in order to be permitted to partake of the mysteries, particularly the Eucharist. The middle consists of laypeople in good standing who participate regularly in the mysteries and are learning to contemplate their symbolism, and the highest of monks, who are progressing to more and more profound contemplation of the symbols; they thus participate more perfectly in the mysteries, with the goal of perfect union with God.²³ The higher orders of the hierarchy are associated not only with progressively more profound contemplation of the mysteries—those moving images of ritual enactment—but also with greater insight into the scriptures, the verbal images whose interpretation is addressed more fully in *On the Celestial Hierarchy* and *On the Divine Names*.

Dionysius sometimes designates monks by the word *therapeutai*, derived from Philo's account of Jewish ascetics in *De vita contemplativa* via the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius of Caesarea, who mistook them for early Christian ascetics. But in the passage from the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* Dionysius focuses more on the significance of the term 'monk' (*monachos*), which he interprets not with reference to exterior solitude,

but as indicating inward recollection and unification of the powers of the soul so as to achieve union with the one God.²⁴ Louth and Golitzin see behind Dionysius' strongly interiorised interpretation of *monachos* a Syriac inspiration, from the term *ibidaya*, a word of manifold meanings. Two of the most significant are, first, its use to refer to Jesus as the only Son of God (translating the Greek *monogenes*), thus identifying the monk with the life of Christ, and, second, the sense of singleness or simplicity of heart, a key theme in Jewish and early Christian ethics.²⁵

The monk is initiated into this life of intense singleness by a rite of monastic consecration.²⁶ This contains parallels with the rite of baptism that all Christians undergo, but intensifies the commitments given in the latter, so that the monk renounces not only all evil activities, but even the neutral activities that are permitted to laypeople in the world, as well as any fantasies that distract from his single-minded purpose. This is symbolised by various elements of the rite, such as the signing with the cross, the tonsure, and the change of garb, which also set him apart from laypeople.²⁷

Other elements of the rite indicate the monk's somewhat ambivalent status in relation to the clergy. The fact of having a specific consecration for his order brings him closer to the clergy than the rest of the lay triad, and is signified in the rite by the kiss of peace given him by the officiating clergy and the subsequent communion of the Eucharist. It is also expressed by his being subject to particular care and guidance by the bishop for the purpose of contemplating the mysteries more deeply and being thereby perfected. Yet the consecration itself is performed by a priest, thus distinguishing it from clerical ordinations which are performed by the bishop.²⁸ Dionysius' interpretation of the first phase of the rite, where unlike ordinands to the diaconate or priesthood the monk neither kneels nor has the Gospel book placed over his head, defines the role of the monk in his proper order:

His standing before the priest as he recites the words of the sacred invocation makes it clear that the monastic order is not one that leads others forward, but rather one that stands by itself in a solitary and sacred stance, following the sacerdotal orders and by them, as an attendant, being led up submissively to the understanding of the sacred things proper to it.²⁹

Thus the monastic does not have an external task, such as leading others to purification or illumination or perfection, but instead is to practice

an intense inward attentiveness, humbling himself before the hierarch in order to receive the perfecting light that he conveys to the monk.

Holl identified this as the first known description in early Christian literature of monastic consecration as a sacrament, involving priestly mediation.³⁰ As Golitzin has noted, this is true if one takes into account only literature in Greek.³¹ In Syriac, we find already in the fourth century (using material originating in the third or even second century), evidence for a public, clerically enacted rite of consecration for *bnay/bnat qyama*, an order of dedicated ascetics both male and female. These celibate ascetics continued to live among the larger community, serving as a kind of type and sign of the life to come for their fellow-Christians.³² This 'pre-monastic' or 'proto-monastic' movement persisted even after the arrival in the Syriac world of the monastic ideal in its 'classic' anchoritic and coenobitic forms in the second half of the fourth century. Dionysius' presentation of the particular relationship of monastics to both the clergy above them and the laypeople below them and their corresponding position in the physical space of the church during the liturgy finds parallels in the early fifth-century canons for *bnay/bnat qyama* by bishop Rabbula of Edessa.³³

Epistle 8 balances the normative picture in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* by contemplating a concrete case of a monk not keeping to his place in the hierarchy.³⁴ Its very placement in the series of epistles symbolises this disruption, because it interrupts an orderly ascent of addressees: from a monk (*Ep.* 1–4), to a deacon (*Ep.* 5), a priest (*Ep.* 6), a bishop (*Ep.* 7), another bishop and fellow disciple of St Paul (Titus, *Ep.* 9), and an actual apostle (the evangelist John, *Ep.* 10). *Ep.* 8 concerns a monk named Demophilus (the only recipient of an epistle who is not drawn from the directory of the New Testament or the Apostolic Fathers, and whose name, significantly, means 'beloved by the mob' or 'crowd-pleaser'³⁵) has written to Dionysius to boast of how he indignantly prevented a priest from receiving a penitent back into communion and how he rushed into the sanctuary to rescue the Eucharistic gifts from this imminent 'defilement.'

Instead of congratulating Demophilus for safeguarding the purity of the mysteries, Dionysius rebukes him roundly, both for upending the ecclesiastical hierarchy and for insulting the goodness and loving-kindness of God himself, which was being manifested by the priest in reconciling the penitent. Dionysius is adamant that one must keep to one's order in the Church, and leave it to those with proper authority to

correct any actual faults in other orders. Rather than seeking to impose order on others, it is the monk's duty to institute a proper ordering in his soul, with reason ruling over aggression and desire, so as to imitate the gentleness and love of Christ. This imitation is emphasised in the vivid tale concluding the epistle, describing a terrifying vision supposed to have been beheld by Bishop Carpus of Crete.³⁶ This holy man, who was accustomed to seeing auspicious visions while preparing to celebrate the Eucharistic liturgy, had been outraged when a member of his Christian flock was led into apostasy by a pagan.³⁷ The night before his next liturgy, he saw a vision in which the apostate and his seducer were teetering on the brink of hell, and he was eagerly trying to push them down all the sooner, until Christ himself appeared and rebuked him, saying that he was willing to suffer on the Cross all over again if it would save such sinners as these.

These, then, are the main lines of Dionysius' teaching on the place of monks in the hierarchies. For all its positive depiction of monasticism, it went against the common perception that monastic holy men possessed a charisma and authority independent of their place in the official hierarchy and that they were entitled to a leading role in the church, similar to that of the prophets in the Old Testament.³⁸

But Dionysius in fact leaves some loose ends that complicate the apparent rigidity of his system. For one, he *does* address the possibility of unworthy clergy, in the otherwise hierarchy-affirming *Epistle* 8. He states that a priest who is not himself illumined cannot illumine others, and it is rash for him to venture to undertake priestly tasks in transgression of his *axia*. The latter term in Dionysius evokes simultaneously the sense of objective 'rank' and of subjective 'worthiness.'³⁹ He goes on to wonder at the rashness involved in such a priest thinking that he can deceive God as he dares to imitate Christ while invoking his own impious blasphemies on the divine symbols. Here not just the priest himself, but even the very prayers he utters are cast into doubt; he is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Such a view does not tally easily with the *ex opere operato* doctrine that eventually became standard in medieval Christianity both east and west, but it is widespread in eastern Christian authors of late antiquity.⁴⁰

The converse of this stark dismissal of unworthy clergy can be seen in Dionysius' descriptions of the qualifications of a true hierarch, which is summed up in the introduction to the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*: 'We shall then be able to be consecrated and consecrators, light-like and working the acts of God, initiated into perfection by the rites and perfecting

others through their celebration.⁴¹ Several other passages expand on the principle that clergy must possess the qualities they are to convey. The following one from the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* is closest in tone and content to the warning in *Epistle* 8. Here Dionysius is interpreting the symbolism of the hierarch's receiving the Eucharist first and then imparting it to the rest of the faithful.

The sacred leader first of all participates in the abundance of the holy gifts which God has commanded him to give to others and in this way he goes on to impart them to others ... Whoever wrongfully dares to teach holiness to others before he has regularly practiced it himself is unholy and is a stranger to sacred norms. Just as the finest and the most luminous of beings are the first to be filled with the sun's rays and then pass on the superabundant light to others after them, so if God's inspiration and choice have not summoned one to the task of leadership, if one has not yet received perfect and lasting divinisation, one must avoid the arrogance of guiding others.⁴²

Another passage slightly earlier interprets the washing of the hands by the clergy before the anaphora of the Eucharistic liturgy:

With his extremities thus purified he preserves the utter purity of his conformity to God and he will then be able to turn benevolently to secondary tasks while yet remaining free and unsullied. For being completely at one, he can immediately turn back to the One to whom he remains so bound by a pure and untarnished return that the fullness and the constancy of his conformity to God is maintained ... Those who approach this most holy sacred act are obliged to be purified even from whatever last fantasies there are in their souls. They must themselves virtually match the purity of the rites they perform and in this way they will be illuminated by ever more divine visions, for those transcendent rays prefer to give off the fullness of their splendour more purely and more luminously in mirrors made in their image.⁴³

The emphasis on interior unity and on freedom from fantasies recalls the themes of monastic consecration discussed above, something to which we will return in our conclusion.

A passage interpreting the consecration of the holy *myron*, is also relevant. According to Dionysius, the veiling of the *myron* symbolises the way that holy men conceal their virtue, so as not to be seen of men, and

look only to the divine prototype to mould themselves rather than being turned aside to seeming goods.⁴⁴ This parallels monastic counsels to cultivate virtue in secret and avoid vainglory. The warnings against seeking the applause of the many find a negative echo also in the name of the recipient of *Ep.* 8, Demophilus, as discussed above.

This close identification of the moral and institutional qualities required for clerical office goes against the grain of most modern theological sensibilities, both east and west.⁴⁵ John Meyendorff saw only two possibilities of interpretation, both bad: one finds in Dionysius' doctrine either a kind of magical clericalism (the sacraments are worked automatically by virtue of the celebrant's place in an objectified ecclesiastical hierarchy) or a gnostic perfectionism (the initiatory and anagogic power of the sacraments is 'merely' symbolic and depends on the personal illumination of the hierarch, passed along individualistically only to the worthy).⁴⁶ Wesche writes of the 'tremendous responsibility' of the hierarch, implying that this burden is too heavy to bear.⁴⁷ Yet it should be noted that, for all the stringency of his expectations, Dionysius does allow room for clerical error. This is most apparent in the edifying story concluding *Epistle* 8: the protagonist Carpus is a model Dionysian hierarch who nevertheless fell into the grave sin of spite against those whom he ought to have treated with pastoral compassion. The fact that Carpus lived to tell the tale to Dionysius implies that he repented and continued in office.

However, in another passage of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* in which the liturgy is being interpreted, Dionysius describes the spiritual state of everyone who worthily partakes of the Eucharist in a manner hard to distinguish from the above descriptions of monastic and clerical virtue:

For if it is true that the wholly divine man – he who is a worthy communicant of the divine things, he who has been led up through utterly perfect and perfecting deifications to the summit of divine likeness that is proper to him – will not do anything that is of the flesh, apart from the basic necessities in accord with nature (and when this happens, as an afterthought), but will be both a temple and an attendant of the Holy Spirit through the most sublime deification proper to him, settling the like in the like, then such a one would never be possessed by the opposing fantasies or terrors, but instead laugh at them and beat them down when they approach and chase them away, and he will act rather than be acted upon, and in addition to the dispassionate and unyielding character of his own acquired habit, he will appear as a physician of such demonic activities in other people.⁴⁸

This is presented as the condition of *all* who are able to partake in the mysteries, not specifically of clergy or monastics. The phrase ‘what is proper to him’ suggests that Dionysius still has an eye on proper order within the hierarchy. He nevertheless describes such a person as an attendant (*opados*) directly on the Holy Spirit, whereas the same term is used to describe monks in relation to clergy later in the treatise.⁴⁹ Furthermore, it is foreseen that such persons will not only be healthy in themselves, but will serve to heal others. Such an active role on the part of unspecified Christians, not all necessarily bishops or even clergy, stands in tension with the strict distribution of activities taught by Dionysius elsewhere. It in fact reminds one more of the activity of monastic holy men in much late antique hagiography, healing both clergy and laypeople of demonic temptations in body and soul.⁵⁰

If this passage recalls one element of Pseudo-Dionysius’ late antique monastic context, then his reaction to Demophilus evokes another. The story of the irascible monk who thinks he is defending truth and goodness recalls the climate of the fifth and sixth centuries, which saw more than their fair share of monks heroic or fanatical (depending on one’s point of view), who defended what they considered the true faith against perceived threats of heresy.⁵¹ While *Epistle* 8 does not deal with heresy per se, Demophilus claims to be guarding the purity of the Eucharist against defilement by an unworthy penitent and the irresponsible priest who was about to reconcile him with the church contains many of the elements for the reception of a convert from heresy in late antiquity.⁵² Thus Dionysius’ emphatic denial to monks of the right or duty to censure clergymen may be seen as part of the irenic approach to theological disagreement that the Arcopagite seems to proffer as the solution to contemporary ills.

BRIEF REMARKS IN THE SCHOLIA BY JOHN OF SCYTHOPOLIS

One of the first commentators on Dionysius, John, metropolitan bishop of Scythopolis in Palestine, was concerned with some of the same troubles. He wrote his *Prologue* and *Scholia* to the corpus between 537 and 543, only a generation or two after its composition.⁵³ In the opening scholion to *Epistle* 8, he remarks ‘Note that these evils also took place in those times’; he may have been consoled by the fact that even the saintly men of old had had to deal with such turmoil.⁵⁴

Rorem and Lamoreaux, in their study and partial translation of the *Scholia*, show that John consistently emphasises the authority of the bishop even beyond what the text of Dionysius itself warrants, by means of selective amplification and minimisation in the glosses rather than explicit disagreement with the text.⁵⁵ For example, John passes over in silence the passage from *Epistle* 8 where Dionysius entertains the possibility that a priest might belie his rank by an evil life.⁵⁶ He also ignores Dionysius' suggestion that a bishop might be corrected by his peers, instead noting the alternative suggestion that he be corrected by the apostles and the successors of the apostles—John identifies the latter with the patriarchs of his time. He thus transforms Dionysius' vision of a kind of collegial process of mutual correction into a more rigid, more 'hierarchical,' affair. His interpretation should probably be understood in the context of contemporary codification of both imperial and ecclesiastical law, which affected the theory and sometimes even the practice of church governance. In this legal view of things, monasticism was increasingly subjected to episcopal control, but episcopal exercise of authority was itself subject to oversight by the five great patriarchal sees, the system of 'pentarchy.'⁵⁷

Yet in an earlier scholium on the same *Epistle*, when addressing Dionysius' ban on the correction of superiors by their inferiors, John adds an important exemption: 'Except of course in the case of heresy.'⁵⁸ Here John goes beyond the text explicitly, and in an *anti*-hierarchical direction. He may have felt justified in doing so because the case of Demophilus does not appear to involve heresy, at least on the surface. But if it is true that Dionysius framed his strictures in the context of the Christological controversies, John's scholium undermines Dionysius' grounds for forbidding monks from donning the prophetic mantle of righteous indignation. Perhaps John was influenced by the example, near to hand, of the fifth- and sixth-century monks of the Judean desert who, led by the archimandrites Euthymius, Sabas, and Theodosius, upheld Chalcedonian orthodoxy against the threats of emperors, stiffening the resolve of wavering patriarchs of Jerusalem on several occasions by summoning monks to mass demonstrations.⁵⁹

Apart from this, John does not add much to Dionysius' picture of monks, except to specify more concretely what their renunciation involves. Thus, where Dionysius says that many activities of the middle way of life (i.e. of the laity) are forbidden to monks, John supplements this with two scholia. He specifies that such activities include

participation in governmental or commercial affairs.⁶⁰ He also uses the opportunity to polemicise against a diffuse heretical movement known as the Messalians for neglecting bodily asceticism and falling into all sorts of carnal sins, all the while claiming to have attained dispassion (*apatheia*).⁶¹ Thus in the two scholia on this passage John combines his polemical interests with a concern for the ascetical regimen of monks, a natural concern for a conscientious sixth-century hierarch such as John.⁶²

SOME CURIOUS QUOTATIONS IN THE *PANDECT* OF ANTIOCHUS OF MAR SABA

Antiochus of Mar Saba is a late representative of the flowering of the same staunchly orthodox Judean monasticism that may have inspired John's scholium on the duty to resist heresy. He wrote in the second decade of the seventh century, when the monasteries were severely tried by the Persian and Arab invasions of Palestine. His *Pandect* is a compendium of the teachings of Scripture, mostly on moral topics, written at the request of a monastic brotherhood in his native Galatia, because their monastery and its library had been destroyed by the Persian invaders. The work is a series of 130 topical discourses, each on a particular virtue or vice, woven together primarily of scriptural and patristic quotations, mostly without attribution.⁶³ He quotes substantial passages from Dionysius five times, four of which are relevant to us here.⁶⁴

The first quotation, opening chapter 115 'On Meekness,' is taken, with minor adjustments, from the beginning of *Epistle* 8 to Demophilus, which presents Moses as a model of that virtue.⁶⁵ Although Antiochus does not explicitly correlate meekness with monastic subjection, the placement of the chapter among other chapters directly or indirectly related to proper order in the church would help a reader make the connection, even without direct knowledge of the original Dionysian context. The second quotation, from chapter 122 'On archpriesthood,' is a composite, with a passage from *Celestial Hierarchy* sandwiched in between two parts of a passage from *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.⁶⁶ Antiochus replaces the term hierarchy at the beginning with *archierosyne*, literally 'archpriesthood,' that is, the office of bishop.⁶⁷ This is an innocuous elision. His use of the sentence from *Celestial Hierarchy*, however, differs from Dionysius by presenting the bishop, rather than the highest angelic orders, as being directly illumined by God.⁶⁸ But when he returns to the second part of the quotation from *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, instead of

the original ‘He who says the world “hierarchy” denotes the inspired and divine man who understands all sacred knowledge,’ which is descriptive, Antiochus makes it prescriptive: ‘The arch-hierarchy *must be* an inspired and divine man, filled with all sacred understanding and knowledge.’

This is no accident, since much of these chapters on the clergy consists of quotations from scriptural passages and the Apostolic Fathers prescribing the duties and attributes of good pastors, as well as the divine threats against those who do not live up to these standards. After one particularly stringent exposition, Antiochus places his second quotation from Dionysius, on the nature of hierarchy and the role of the hierarchy in general. This comes from *Celestial Hierarchy* and, though leaving phrases from the original out, does not alter its sense—unless perhaps, by quoting directly from the treatise on the angels, he implies again that the bishop has unmediated access to God, as in the previous quotation.⁶⁹

Finally, in the following chapter, ‘On the ordering of the clergy,’ Antiochus quotes at length from *Epistle* 8, on the need to remain within one’s proper station.⁷⁰ Despite the differences noted above, he is in close agreement with the spirit of the Dionysian system, exhorting monks to give respect and obedience to the clergy, and everyone to submit to the bishop. This is probably due largely to his background as a monk of the illustrious monastery of Mar Saba, which had enjoyed such a strong and fruitful relationship with the patriarchate of Jerusalem.⁷¹ Thus Antiochus does not contradict Dionysius, but expands on the remarks of the latter regarding the need for clergy to first be purified and illumined themselves before they purify and illumine others. Unlike Dionysius, he does not discuss the avenues for correcting or deposing wayward clergy, but instead emphasises the fearful reckoning they should expect at God’s throne of judgement.

HIERARCHY IN THE *EPISTLES* OF MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Maximus the Confessor (c.580–662) was a contemporary, probably somewhat younger, of Antiochus.⁷² The general lines of the influence of the Areopagite on the Confessor have been ably mapped by such scholars as Polycarp Sherwood and Andrew Louth.⁷³ More recently Maximos Constas, while stating that ‘Maximus derived his fundamental philosophical framework from the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite,’ nevertheless argues that Maximus diverges significantly on certain key topics,

including hierarchy.⁷⁴ According to Conostas, while making a formal reference to this central Areopagite idea in his *Mystagogy*, Maximus' revision of the Neoplatonist doctrine of procession and his fine-tuning of its Dionysian version allows him to dismiss the rigid ontological hierarchies of Dionysius in favour of immediate union with God, in principle available to every believer.⁷⁵ It is true that Maximus does not normally employ the language of Dionysian hierarchy. But he does not so thoroughly discard its intuition and apparatus as Conostas and others have assumed. Rather, he expresses some of its ideas in different, more nuanced, ways.

It is to Maximus' *Mystagogy* that one naturally first turns to try to find the signs of Dionysius' influence in this regard, since it is presented by Maximus as a commentary on the Eucharistic liturgy that continues where the venerable Dionysius left off. In fact, as noted by Conostas, the lexeme *hierarch-* only appears in the reference to the title of Dionysius' treatise *On Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and in a passing mention of the 'hierarch' leaving the sanctuary to cense the nave. In the rest of the work, neither the hierarchy nor the hierarch figure, explicitly or implicitly. One finds rather a repeated grading of participation (and participants) in the liturgy based on direct contemplation of the liturgical symbols according to individual spiritual capacity. This capacity, furthermore, is in principle open to improvement and perfection irrespective of one's formal status within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Absent is any mention of bishop or priest or deacon mediating this participation or of their superior capacity to receive divine illumination.⁷⁶

This much cannot be disputed, and inasmuch as Conostas and others have relied on the *Mystagogy* for their understanding of Maximus' engagement with hierarchy, it would seem natural to perceive therein a tacit dismissal of Dionysian categories. Caution is in order, however, in drawing conclusions from the content of the *Mystagogy*. Maximus states at the outset that he assumes the insights of the wise Dionysius as a given, and will proceed to consider areas the latter left for others to examine.⁷⁷ We should take this avowal seriously.⁷⁸ It may well be the case that his interpretation ends up correcting Dionysius, but if it does so, this would be the result of creative interpretation and expansion rather than correction per se.⁷⁹

Golitzin, in particular, has argued that Dionysius, following older Syrian ascetical tradition, assumes three levels of participation in the symbolism of scripture and liturgy, namely, the actual rites as performed visibly in the church, the cosmic plan of salvation that these present to the eyes of faith,

and the interior work of cultivating virtue in the 'little church' of the individual soul.⁸⁰ Maximus is particularly adept at explicating the third level, which remains somewhat underdeveloped in Dionysius. This is apparent in the following passage from the *Centuries on Charity*:

He who anoints his mind for the sacred contests and drives bad thoughts from it has the characteristics of a deacon; of a priest, however, if he illumines it with knowledge of beings and utterly destroys counterfeit knowledge; of a bishop, finally, if he perfects it with the sacred myrrh of knowledge of the worshipful Trinity.⁸¹

Whereas at first Maximus might appear here to be subverting the ecclesiastical hierarchy, if read through the lens of threefold interpretation suggested by Golitzin, he is simply finding a way to apply the symbolism of the outward rites to inner experience, without detracting from the former. His exegesis draws on Dionysius' doctrine of baptism and of the roles of the various clerical orders, albeit with adjustments.⁸²

To see how Maximus uses this inner exegesis to affirm the institutional hierarchy, I propose that we turn now to another, rather neglected portion of Maximus' writings: the letters he wrote to clergy of various ranks, some of which are found among his *Epistles* proper and some among his *Minor Theological and Polemical Works*.⁸³ In most of these letters Maximus addresses his clerical correspondents with great deference, as would be dictated by ecclesiastical etiquette and common prudence. But he enriches conventional niceties with brief yet profound reflections on the nature of priesthood in its various degrees. Moreover, in his own epistolary persona he models proper monastic submission to the clergy. That this approach is largely informed by his reflection on Dionysius can be demonstrated by noting several common themes as well as verbal echoes of the Areopagite corpus. Although some of these similarities might be attributable to their common sources in the patristic tradition, Maximus' acquaintance with Dionysius, as the more proximate relation, seems to me the more probable explanation.

I will limit myself to a sample consisting of *Epistles* 30–31, written to a bishop John, and a group of letters written to a single person, Marinus of Cyprus, at different stages of his clerical career, namely *Epistles* 20 and *Minor Theological Works* 7 and 20. The former pair will give us a glimpse of Maximus' conception of the figure and role of the bishop (the 'hierarchy' of Dionysius) while the latter series will show how Maximus adjusts

his rhetoric and theological meditation in accord with the addressee's ecclesiastical rank. A few other letters will be mentioned briefly in conclusion.⁸⁴

MODELLING HIERARCHY: SELECTED LETTERS OF MAXIMUS

We begin, then, with *Epistles* 30 and 31, both to a certain bishop John. These are brief letters of practical import, entreating John to gather the various monastic sheep of his flock (including Maximus) who had been scattered by the threat of barbarian invasion.⁸⁵ Approximately the first half of each of these letters is taken up by discussions of the nature of priesthood. *Ep.* 30 begins by describing how fire draws into itself all underlying material, and continues: 'Applying this symbolically to God, the interpreters of the divine mysteries say that he too draws to himself all those who wish to obey his commandments and consent to embrace holy living.' These unnamed theologians extend the comparison to priesthood, the image and imitation of the Godhead, so that 'it also, by virtue of the same law of sympathy according to grace, is attractive of everything of the same nature.' Maximus then applies the image to his addressee, and proceeds to use the conceit to appeal to him to call to himself his flock 'with the actions and words of sympathy' and to 'confirm your providence, with God, toward them.'⁸⁶

Ep. 31 begins with another image of light, that of a ray that attracts to itself the gaze of those who have naturally healthy vision. Maximus then applies the symbol directly to the ecclesiastical realm:

So also the true priesthood, being in all ways an exact image (*charakter*) of the blessed divinity to those on earth, attracts toward itself every soul that is habituated to being God-loving and divine, and conveys to it its own knowledge, peace, and love; in order that, by bringing each faculty of the soul to the limit (*peras*) of its own proper activity, it might present to God wholly deified those whom it initiates into the mysteries. Now the goal of the rational activity in the soul is true knowledge; of the desiring activity, love; of the aggressive faculty, peace; as also of true priesthood, through these things to be deified and to deify.⁸⁷

He then proceeds to further to a brief analysis analyse the three faculties. In particular, he relates the aggressive faculty to 'divine contests' which conclude in 'the peace that surpasses all understanding.'⁸⁸

The Dionysian echoes in these two letters are apparent, although, as forewarned, they cannot be proven to originate directly from Dionysius. Though images of light are of course classically Dionysian, the closest parallel is the combining of the image of light and of attraction in a passage in *Ep.* 10, to the apostle John on Patmos, where the latter is called the sun of the gospel, to whom evil men will be attracted and converted so as to partake of his light.⁸⁹ The language of *habitus* or *habitation* (*hexis*) in virtue is also common to the two authors.⁹⁰ The discussion of the tripartite soul by Maximus in relation to the bishop's virtuous soul parallels the use of that theme in Dionysius' *Ep.* 8, in counselling Demophilus to set his own tripartite house in order before attempting to order others.⁹¹ Yet the doctrine is common in the Fathers and is handled somewhat differently by our two authors. It is possible that Maximus' language of contests (*agones*) with reference to the aggressive faculty is related to Dionysius' use of the term in relation to baptism as the birth of a Christian athlete, symbolised by anointing with oil, and to the funeral rite as limit (*peras*, the same term used by Maximus) and rest from the contests, recalling the baptismal anointing by the pouring of oil on the body of the deceased.⁹²

What is of particular interest for our purposes, however, is Maximus' presentation of the bishop as a kind of image of God and as conveying to others the goodness that he has realised in himself, encapsulated in *Ep.* 31 by the very Dionysian pairing of receiving and offering deification ('θεοποιεῖσθαι τε καὶ θεοποιεῖν').⁹³ Likewise Areopagitic is the relating, in the same epistle, of deification to mystic initiation ('θεωθέντας ... μυσταγωγούμενους'), although Dionysius himself never connects the terms explicitly. More tenuously, the term *sympatheia*, referred by Maximus to both God's and the priesthood's attractive power, may echo Dionysius' use of the term to describe the mystical union with God of his teacher Hierotheus in a liturgical setting, but with more of an ethical emphasis.⁹⁴ One term in Maximus sounds a note distinct from that of Dionysius, however: it is notable that the former prefers the term *hierosyne*, 'priesthood' (here, it seems, referring to the sacerdotal role of the bishop as priest par excellence) to the latter's beloved *hierarches/hierarchia*.⁹⁵

Let us move on to the letters to Marinus. These constitute a series of theological treatises of various length, sometimes substantial, unlike *Epistles* 30 and 31. Maximus may have made Marinus' acquaintance in a stop on the latter's native Cyprus while traveling west to North Africa.⁹⁶

These letters track Marinus' progression up the clerical *cursus*, from simple monk (*Ep.* 20), to deacon (*Op.* 20), to priest (*Op.* 7).⁹⁷

Ep. 20 is a short treatise on Ps. 110:10 (LXX), on how the fear of God relates to different degrees of wisdom.⁹⁸ In the 'preface' of the epistle Maximus only refers to the monk Marinus' virtues vaguely, as something he has learned of at second hand.⁹⁹ Being of the same ecclesiastical rank, Maximus does not feel the need to expatiate on Marinus' qualifications in light of monastic godliness, but proceeds straight on to his exposition.

The situation changes, however, once Marinus is ordained deacon, in which rank we find him in *Opusculum* 7. He is described as 'initiate and initiator of mysteries' and as possessing priesthood.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the imagery of fire and light is applied to him, as to bishop John in *Ep.* 30–31. But whereas the bishop attracts the spiritually healthy, the deacon's fiery radiance primarily has the effect of burning up evil men and thawing out those frozen by wicked doctrines and deeds.¹⁰¹ As is proper to a clergyman, he has a role in leading others, but this is conceived primarily in terms of turning them away from vice and leading them towards virtue.¹⁰² The employment of fire imagery here in a way different from the letters to John (we might even speak of a difference between 'visual thinking' in the latter and 'tactile thinking' in the former!) seems to follow the Areopagite formulation of the different roles of bishops and deacons, which we have already seen Maximus apply morally to the individual soul in the *Centuries on Love*. Bishops lead up those who are already healthy to the perfection of virtue and knowledge, whereas deacons conduct beginners through the initial stages of purification.¹⁰³ Maximus counts himself among those who have 'a material disposition of soul and are wallowing in the gore of the impure passions.'¹⁰⁴ He thus places himself among the group of uninitiated and penitents at the base of the Dionysian hierarchy, rather than among the purified and illumined monks.

Marinus continues his ascent up the hierarchical *cursus* in *Opusculum* 20, where the Dionysian language is clear and unmistakable. Maximus, in a fashion typical for him, describes the same process of spiritual ascent twice, in a kind of hendiadys; the second version is more relevant for us here:

... withdrawal from everything and with regard to everything and perfect passing beyond all relation therewith ... prepares for decisive entry into the Holy of Holies – where as forerunner on our behalf, in a form like

ours, entered Jesus who transcends us – the person who ascends with him from glory to glory through practical virtue, and who passes through the heavens from knowledge to knowledge through understanding, and who through the secretly initiated and most polyphonous silence, by virtue of the cessation of all intellectual activity, unknowably encounters the Father of spirits. To him by grace and by your blessed diligence with regard to the sacred rites you have been led up in a manner surpassing nature, and you consequently lead up those who, like me, are laid low, stretching out your hand in sympathy through the letter and in word through the intellectual contemplation hidden in it ...¹⁰⁵

There can be no doubt about the source of the paradoxical phrase ‘secretly initiated and most polyphonous silence’: it is woven together from two passages in Dionysius’ *Mystical Theology*.¹⁰⁶ Although Maximus continues with further phrases describing Marinus’ help in turning him away from sin, as in his praise of Marinus as deacon, the emphasis in the remainder of the passage seems to be rather on Marinus’ guidance in helping Maximus transcend symbols to arrive at the simple and unifying love of God. This reflects Dionysius’ description of the role of the priest in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* as being primarily illuminating rather than purifying—although, as being higher than the deacon, the priest also encompasses the latter’s capacities.¹⁰⁷

Before leaving this opusculum, I wish to note that it contains the only instance of *hierarch-* language by Maximus apart from the two uses in the *Mystagogy*.¹⁰⁸ At the end of the letter, which is a short exposition of matters related to the developing monothelete controversy, Maximus requests that Marinus convey its burden ‘to him who hierarchically presides over our blameless and orthodox faith.’¹⁰⁹ This is probably a reference to Arcadius, archbishop of Cyprus, who played a significant but ambiguous role in the early stages of the controversy in question.¹¹⁰ It is possible that Maximus uses the term ‘hierarchically’ offhandedly, as it were, in a sense that had gained currency by his time as simply a synonym for ‘episcopal,’ without any explicit reference to Dionysian hierarchies.¹¹¹ But Maximus then proceeds to praise Arcadius in such characteristically Dionysian terms as radiance (*ellampsin*), anagogy, leading by the hand (*cheiragogoumetha*), theurgy, mediation, providing access (*prosaagoge*), stability (*monen*), and perfection (*teleiosin*).¹¹² This passage should thus be taken into account as an addition to the vocabulary of hierarchy in Maximus.¹¹³

OBSERVATIONS ON MAXIMUS' LETTERS: HUMILITY AS A NEW PATH ALONG THE HIERARCHY

It is tempting to dismiss Maximus' Dionysian *laus hierarchi* as mere flattery. But Maximus excelled at 'the fine art of turning a compliment which has, notwithstanding, a solid theological content,' as Sherwood put it.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, encomiastic and panegyric forms in ancient literature were often put to use as vehicles of instruction or even criticism in situations when such could not be offered directly; they were a medium through which to speak truth to power, albeit in a veiled or tactful way.¹¹⁵ Maximus similarly uses the language of panegyric to teach or censure superiors without formally violating the divinely instituted ecclesiastical hierarchy.¹¹⁶ From this perspective, Maximus' consistent employment of the humility trope in his letters to ecclesiastical superiors should not be dismissed as a mere cliché or simply a *captatio benevolentiae*. It is nevertheless artful, in the sense that it serves to justify the anomalous condition of a simple monk advising, even teaching, bishops and other clergy.¹¹⁷

Another way in which this 'anomaly' is justified is by attributing humility to his addressees. In other epistles, not considered here, he presents the recipients' lofty lowliness—the sublimity of their rank mingled with the humility of their interior disposition—as an imitation of the kenosis of the Son of God. It is this humility which, Maximus claims, has led them to condescend to ask him, the sinner and ignoramus, for answers to various questions, thereby helping to rouse him from his ignorance and arrogance.¹¹⁸

Humility, interestingly, is not a virtue associated with the hierarchy by Dionysius, although one might argue that it is assumed in his teaching on the providential love of superiors for inferiors.¹¹⁹ This emphasis on hierarchical humility, as well as a more explicit delineation of interior hierarchy within the soul of each believer (as mentioned above briefly with reference to the *Mystagogy* and the *Centuries on Love*), is perhaps Maximus' most important contribution to refining or expanding (or correcting, as some might have it) the Dionysian concept of hierarchy. It binds the hierarchies even closer to Jesus and the Incarnation than Dionysius already does. Furthermore, it covers one of the major blind spots of Dionysius' hierarchy, namely an exclusive emphasis on the top-down conveyance of illumination. Although, according to Dionysius, love can be exercised reciprocally up and down the hierarchy, it does not seem that superiors can really *benefit* from inferiors. Maximus, by

positing humility as the means by which a superior can learn from an inferior, opens a channel, however narrow, for an upward movement of illumination. Thus he manages to render the hierarchies more flexible without explicitly transgressing the order set out by Dionysius.¹²⁰

To dispel any lingering doubts as to the sincerity of Maximus' submission to the clergy in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, one need only glance at his actions. Throughout his career he worked through the hierarchy, not outside it or against it. Even when he took up arms against the heresies of Monenergism and Monotheletism, which were promoted by some of the highest members of the clergy, he did so not as a lonely voice in the wilderness, but as much as possible with the cooperation and oversight of other elements of the clergy, especially from Rome, the most senior church. Only towards the end, when even the Roman church seemed to have caved in to imperial pressure, did he refuse to submit. Even then, his resistance did not take the form of usurping the role of the higher clergy, but simply of refusing to capitulate, without venturing to issue an explicit anathema against anyone. Doubtless his policy through the years, with its various vicissitudes, was also attuned to the demands of diplomacy and politics, but the Dionysian ethos provides a thread of consistency.¹²¹ Both in working for the correction of heretical bishops by orthodox ones and in his final stand against heresy in high places, he was following the reading of Dionysius recommended by John of Scythopolis, as discussed above. Thus in Maximus we see a marriage of the ascetical-mystical and clerical-canonical interpretations of Dionysius, drawn both from the master himself and from his earliest commentator.

CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen, Maximus' *encomia* are in effect compact 'mini-treatises' on the nature of the various clerical ranks and on priesthood in general. His recipients are praised for, and thereby instructed in, ascetical and mystical excellence, the attainment of virtue and knowledge. Their individual prowess merges seamlessly with their pastoral role, as in Dionysius. It is thus reasonable to suggest that Dionysius' presentation of hierarchs and other clergy as holy men serves the same function as it does in Maximus. It is not an 'obvious sin against truth,' as Golitzin puts it, but an implicit exhortation. The citations of Dionysius by Antiochus of Mar Saba follow the same general lines, albeit rendering the hortatory element slightly more explicit.

Such a hortatory reading also suggests a different approach to Golitzin's metaphor of Dionysius' ecclesiastical hierarchy as an icon of the celestial, with his criticism of Dionysius for not distinguishing between flawed present and perfected eschaton. It might be more helpful to understand the 'iconicity' of Dionysius' depiction as a kind of exemplar to which readers might aspire, as an artist might constantly refer to a model in order to capture its features in his own painting. The metaphor of the painter leads us back to the milieu of Basil of Caesarea, who employed the conceit to suggest the importance of studying the lives of saints for formation in virtue.¹²² Hortatory, didactic use of panegyric is evident in such important early Christian reflections on the episcopal ideal as the encomia of Basil by Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa.

Commentators on the rigidity of Dionysius' ecclesiastical hierarchy have largely ignored the phenomenon, exemplified by the aforementioned Cappadocian Fathers, of holy bishops in late antiquity renouncing the world yet leading the church, to combine the titles of two recent studies on this topic.¹²³ This merging of clerical and monastic virtues is, in general, a rather neglected component of eastern Christian history. To be sure, not everyone in late antiquity thought along these lines; we have seen that John of Scythopolis, at least in his scholia, places his hopes for episcopal fitness more on the developing system of canon law than on the moral preparation of candidates. Nevertheless, to return us to the starting point of this essay, some of the tensions we perceive in the ideal of hierarchy would be resolved or at least mitigated if we investigate more carefully Byzantine reflections on the moral and ascetical qualities that the leading figures of the hierarchy are supposed to exhibit.

Within this common tradition, however, there were differences of emphasis. The image of the bishop that Maximus proposes differs in one substantial respect from that of Dionysius. I have shown that, despite the near-absence of the term in the *Mystagogy*, 'hierarchy' is to be found in the *Epistles* and *Minor Theological Works*. Nevertheless, though Maximus uses much of the same language for the clergy as Dionysius, the connotations of the imagery differ because it is not placed emphatically in the context of the liturgy. Although liturgical language is not lacking, Maximus' cleric is not primarily the celebrant of the Eucharist or the other sacraments. He is the consummate holy man who is able to lead others, with the radiance of his godlike qualities and inspired teaching, through the ascetical stages of purification, illumination, and deification.

Although Maximus would certainly not deny the importance of the sacraments, they are somewhat peripheral in his vision of the holy hierarch.¹²⁴ His solution for resolving the tension between monastic and episcopal authority is, to put it somewhat over-schematically, to make the cleric a holy man, and not vice versa. The result is that Dionysius, for all that he is often accused of overly spiritualising the liturgical rites and excessively identifying the efficacy of the clergy with their personal state, integrates clerical holiness more fully into the ‘moving image’ of the liturgical rites.

Dionysius nevertheless meets Maximus half-way, as it were, since he implies that monks are the natural candidates for the episcopacy, and for clerical office in general. If bishops are supposed to themselves be first purified, illuminated, and perfected, in order to be able to purify, illumine, and perfect others, who better to select for ordination to this demanding ministry than those from among the lay orders who have had as their constant labour the attainment of these qualities in themselves—namely the monks? The monastic ring that we heard in Dionysius’ description of several of the virtues of the hierarch—uniformity through union with the One, purification from even the vestiges of sinful fantasies in the soul, the attainment of dispassion—lends further support to this supposition. Furthermore, the fact that, in Dionysius’ conception, monks are physically close to the rest of the ecclesiastical community (unlike the alternative monastic ideal of physical withdrawal into the wilderness) and are under the special care and direction of the hierarch would conceivably render them even more suitable for eventual ordination.¹²⁵ Maximus’ own way of life, involving close relations with clergy and laypeople, in fact exemplifies the kind of monastic order envisioned in the *Corpus Dionysiicum*, although he himself was never ordained.

In the end, no one concept and no one image can do justice to the complex nature of the hierarchical relationship of monastics and clergy, viz. bishops. It is therefore fitting that, in the mature Byzantine tradition, the fruit of long centuries of reflection on this topic is an entire architectural and iconographic complex. Among the images enshrined in this complex, we find the holy hierarch depicted in both the fustian weeds of the monk and the fulgent vesture of the bishop. There remains the task of interpreting such images and of modelling oneself on them, so that, instead of staling into ‘sins against the truth,’ they remain a juvenile visual and conceptual ‘banquet ... which nourishes noetically and deifies’.¹²⁶

NOTES

1. For an overview, see Golitzin (2013, 379–97); cf. the more cautious appraisal by Louth (2008b, 586–8).
2. Golitzin (1994, 9).
3. To get a sense of the monastic regimen that Golitzin experienced, see the documentary Feißt et al. (1981).
4. See Pseudo-Dionysius, *CH* III.1–IV.1; 17.3–20.20; *EH* I.i–V; 63.3–68.15. The magisterial study is Roques (1954); see also Rorem (1993). For an overview of the late antique social and cultural background for Dionysius’ exposition of hierarchies, see the contribution by Marsengill in the present volume.
5. For a brief overview of modern Dionysian scholarship, see Golitzin (2013, xix–xxxiii). A sample of views, in approximate order from less to more sympathetic: Wesche (1989), Meyendorff (1969, 68–84), and Florovsky (1987, 204–29) (cf. Golitzin 1999); Roques (1954, 196–9, 335–9) and Loudovikos (2016, 34–42). There have been, however, several attempts to justify the hierarchies more or less completely. A sample of these, this time in chronological order: von Balthasar (2006 [originally 1962], 144–210, esp. 191–203), Louth (1989, 38–43, 52–75, 104–8, 130–4), Perl (1994), and Stang (2012, 82–116).
6. Holl (1898, 205–10).
7. Cf. Baynes (1955, 26–7) and Brown (1971, 1983, 1995).
8. See note 1 above for overviews by Golitzin and Louth. Cf. Booth (2014, 7–43, esp. 25–30), on Dionysius’ place in a broader late antique movement to integrate ascetical and sacramental piety.
9. Golitzin (2013, 379–97, esp. 390).
10. Golitzin (2007, 125).
11. Golitzin (2013, 278–94); this passage is suggestive but suffers from a certain lack of clarity (see note 46 below). For the term ‘antinomies’ (280), Golitzin cites Roques (1961, 314), but his emphasis on the eschatological tension they express is, I suspect, drawn from the thought of Georges Florovsky, for example Florovsky (1957); cf. Golitzin (1999).
12. Golitzin (2013, 280).
13. For a more general overview, see the section ‘Influence du Pseudo-Denys en Orient,’ in Rayez (1957, 286–318) (with contributions by Polycarp Sherwood and Antoine Wenger), and for an approach from a slightly different angle than Golitzin’s, see Louth (2008b). The ideal of the ascetic-bishop is noted by Romanides (1963–1964, 230): ‘Thus in traditional Eastern spirituality it is not the administrator as over against the contemplative who makes for the ideal bishop, but

rather the hesychast. Such is the bishop, e.g., as described by Dionysius the Areopagite. The greatest bishops of the Orthodox Church were ascetics’.

14. The refectory frescoes are the work of monks from yet another Athonite monastery, Xenophontos; the apse was completed in 2007.
15. *EH* I.iii; 66.18–19: [Ἀπάση δὲ τοῦτο κοινὸν ἱεραρχία τὸ πέρας· ...] αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἐνὸς ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἢ τῆς ἐποψίας ἐστίαςις τρέφουσα νοητῶς καὶ θεοῦσα πάντα τὸν εἰς αὐτὴν ἀνατεινόμενον. The words in brackets are absent from the scroll; I have added them here to make a complete sentence of the quotation.
16. Djurić (1991); Dionysius does not seem to have been included in older versions of this program (131).
17. The architecture and iconography of Orthodox monastic refectories has not received much attention; for basic overviews, see Yiannias (1991) and Popović (1998). The presence of all the elements that I mention here is rare, but partial combinations are common. It should be noted that the ideal of the ascetical bishop is also frequently presented in the Byzantine hymnography for episcopal saints, which plays an important role in monastic life along with architecture and icons.
18. For such a synthetic and polyvalent function of images (both literary and visual), albeit in the context of debates over the sacral nature of the imperial office in Byzantium, see Dagron (2003, 181).
19. I suspect that an important link in the genealogy would be the hesychast movement, which reinforced the earlier Byzantine trend toward selecting accomplished monks to fill episcopal posts.
20. The first four epistles are also written to monks (*therapeutai*), briefly interpreting specific aspects of the teaching on mystical union with God: *Ep.* I–IV; 156, 1–161, 10. There is also a probable allusion to the monastic way of life in *Ep.* X; 208, 12–209, 4) and at *CH* IV.4; 23, 6–8, as argued by Golitzin (2013, 4–6).
21. *EH* VI.i.3–iii.5; 116, 7–119, 15, *Ep.* VIII; 171, 1–192, 2. The only dedicated study of monasticism in Dionysius is Roques (1961). For the early sixth-century problems to which Dionysius is responding, see Mainoldi (2018, 230–40).
22. The term ‘ecclesiastical hierarchy’ is only found in the title, which is probably not original; in the text itself, Dionysius refers always to ‘our hierarchy’ (Rorem 1993, 91–2). *Myron* is an oil mixed with fragrant substances, blessed, and then used in several ecclesiastical rites, such as the chrismation that seals baptism and the consecration of churches.
23. *EH* V.i.2–7 and VI.i.1–3; 105, 21–110, 5 and 115, 1–116, 23. Cf. Roques (1954, 179–99) and Rorem (1993, 19–21, 95–6, 108–9, 111–12).

24. Both terms are explained at *EH* VI.i.3; 116, 15–19, but the rest of the passage uses only *monachos*; *therapeutes* is used exclusively in the *Epistles*. On the varied deployment of the terms and their meaning for Dionysius, see Roques (1961, 305–7). On Eusebius as the main source for the pseudonymous Dionysius’ artful reconstruction of an apostolic alibi, see Louth (2013, esp. 49–51) on *therapeutai*.
25. Louth (1989, 70) and Golitzin (2013, 329–33). *Ibidaya* may in fact be the historical origin of the Greek term *monachos*. For this term, see Griffith (1993), and for the ideal of singleness, see Guillaumont (1979). On the imitation of Christ in *Ep.* VIII, see Roques (1961, 304–5).
26. *EH* VI.ii; 117, 1–120, 12. The terminology of a rite or sacrament of consecration (*mysterion monachikes teleioseos*) is found only in the section title, which is probably not original to Dionysius. Dionysius in effect distinguishes the three primary sacraments (baptism, communion, *myron*) from “secondary” rites of ordination, monastic consecration, and funeral (Rorem 1993, 97). For Dionysius’ theology of sacraments, see Roques (1954, 294–301).
27. For comparison and contrast of monastic consecration with baptism, and what this says about the relative hierarchical status of the two states, see Roques (1961, 285–96).
28. *EH* VI.i.3; 116, 11–14, 19–23.
29. *EH* VI.ii.1; 117, 18–22, my translation.
30. Holl (1898, 205) leaving room for the possibility that Dionysius relied on an already extant tradition; cf. Zoukova (2010, 103–6).
31. Golitzin (2013, 7–8, esp. n. 14) (on Holl).
32. The Syriac term is usually translated ‘sons/daughters of the covenant’ but can also denote or connote ‘of the resurrection’ or ‘of the stand/status’; for a useful survey, see Griffith (1993). Unfortunately, the remarks in the early sources (Aphrahat and Ephrem) are quite vague and do not describe the actual form of the rite.
33. Golitzin (2013, 335); for an overview of *bnay/bnat qyama* according to Rabbula’s legislation, see Vööbus (1960, 331–42). Thenceforth there are only scattered mentions of *bnay/bnat qyama*, who seem to have become progressively more distinct from, and inferior to, monastics in their status; cf. Kitchen (2011).
34. *Ep.* VIII; 171, 1–192, 2. For commentary, see Roques (1961, 299–305) and Rorem (1993, 18–24). Hathaway (1969) is useful for the Neoplatonic aspects, but the author’s tone-deafness to Christian language leaves wanting both his analysis (86–104) and translation (140–50) of a text in which Roques rightly perceived ‘l’accent le plus pur et le plus simple de l’Évangile’ (1961, 304).
35. Cf. Golitzin (2013, 8) and Stang (2012, 183).

36. *Ep.* 8.6; 188, 9–192, 2. The source of the story seems to be the early fifth-century letters of the monk Nilus of Ancyra (from *Epistles* 2.190, ‘To the bishop Olympius,’ PG 79:297D–300C, although the printed text is lacunose); it can be classed among the broad genre of ‘edifying stories,’ which often were monastic in origin but had a broad appeal: see Binggeli (2014). But Dionysius’ telling of it is shaped also by Platonic stories of judgment: see Hathaway (1969, 93–6). Carpus is probably supposed to be the associate of the apostle Paul mentioned at 2 Tim. 4:13. Dionysius does not specify what rank he held, but Nilus’ text identifies him as a bishop.
37. Rorem (1984, 138–40) rightly points to the mention of Carpus’ visions as showing that Dionysius assumes a link between liturgical celebration and mystical experience, but he confuses the usual propitious visions (*eumenous horaseos*, *Ep.* 8.6; 188, 12–13) with the ‘bizarre and fantastic spectacle’ where Jesus reproves Carpus for his wrath. The receptivity of holy clergy (and laity) to visions in the context of the liturgy is a common theme in monastic tales of the sixth and seventh centuries, for example in the *Spiritual Meadow* of John Moschus and Sophronius the Sophist; see Déroche (2002, 172–6), Golitzin (2013, 382 n. 39), and Booth (2014, 35–42, 136–7).
38. Cf. Golitzin (2013, 10). Paradoxically, for von Balthasar the identity of Dionysius himself as a monk is confirmed by his humbly placing the monastic below the clerical state (2006, 179). The paradox expresses a profound truth.
39. Roques (1954, 61–3).
40. Déroche (2002, 172–6).
41. *EH* 1.i; 64.12–14 (my translation).
42. *EH* 3.iii.14; 94, 1–10; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 223).
43. *EH* 4.iii.10; 89, 15–19; 89, 21–90, 3; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 219).
44. *EH* 4.iii.1; 96, 11–97, 3.
45. But note the more sympathetic comments in von Balthasar (2006, 176).
46. Meyendorff (1969, 78–9, 82–3); cf. the response of Golitzin (2013, 279–86), which however confuses matters somewhat by collapsing Meyendorff’s two options into one.
47. Wesche (1989, 59).
48. *EH* 3.iii.7; 86, 6–15 (my translation).
49. *EH* 6.iii.1; 117, 21. On contradictory statements regarding mediated and direct access to God in Dionysius, see Golitzin (2013, 283–285).
50. Likewise, expectation of minimal care of the body and the temple imagery resonate strongly with key themes of late antique monastic literature. This is the most explicit passage in Dionysius describing an

- active role for non-clergy, but several others also address ways they can aid or even lead others (*EH* 2.i.2, 2.ii.4, and 7b.xi; 70, 11–19; 76, 4–7; 131, 10–14, 23–9) on the role of baptismal sponsors in preparing their charges before the sacrament and guiding them in a life of virtue afterward, and 7.iii.6; 126, 18–127, 8, on the efficacy of intercessory prayers by holy people, not specified as clergy.
51. On the role of monks in Christological controversy, see Bacht (1953). More generally on the tensions between institutional clergy and charismatic monks in the late antique Syrian church, see Escolan (1999).
 52. Booth (2014, 131–2), with reference to the *Spiritual Meadow*.
 53. Most of the scholia on the Areopagite corpus, printed by Migne in PG 4 under the name of Maximus the Confessor, have been reattributed by modern scholars to John; see von Balthasar (1940) (translated into English as an appendix in von Balthasar 2003, 359–87) and Suchla (2011) (with bibliography on her own and other previous studies), which is a critical edition of the ‘Prologue’ and the scholia on the *Divine Names*, the first part of an edition of all the scholia. For the little that we know of John, his life and works, see Rorem and Lamoreaux (1998 23–36), and for the collation and dating of the scholia, ibidem 36–8; cf. Louth (2008a, 574–8).
 54. PG 4:544C, scholium 1 (Rorem and Lamoreau [trans.] 1998, 256).
 55. Rorem and Lamoreaux (1998, 62–5).
 56. There is a scholium to *EH* 3.iii.10: 152b, scholium 6, one of the passages quoted above regarding the purity required of clergy, but it does not belong to John (Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998, 269).
 57. For this context, see the chapters by Heinz Ohme and Spyridon Troianos in Hartmann and Pennington (2012), as well as Wagschal (2015); cf. Florovsky (1957, 151–2).
 58. PG 4:548B, scholium 2 (Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998, 257).
 59. Bacht (1953, 285–8), Patrich (1995, 301–310), Bitton-Ashkelony (2010, 248–51), and Birkner (2017).
 60. PG 4:172A, scholium 1 (Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998, 179, who omit the mention of marriage found in the Greek text, since it is not in the Syriac translation that serves as their rule of thumb for attributing scholia to John).
 61. PG 4:169D–172A, scholium 19 (Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998, 179).
 62. Attributed to John is also the somewhat puzzling scholium to the title of the *Celestial Hierarchy*, commenting on the meaning of ‘hierarchy,’ wherein John argues that ‘A hierarch is not the high priest, but the one who properly disposes sacred things.’ ‘High priest’ (*archiereus*) was from late antiquity on a common term for a bishop, so it seems strange that John, with his more episcopocentric interpretation, would deny it; though perhaps here he is simply trying to exegete Dionysius (he refers

- to Dionysius' discussion at *EH* 1.iii; 65, 22–66, 19), who never uses the term to refer to a Christian bishop. Note its use by Antiochus of Mar Saba, discussed in the next section.
63. Papadogiannakis (2016). His bibliography should be supplemented with Popovski (1989, esp. 11–16).
 64. Noted in Rayez (1957, 301); the first quotation is found in the first chapter of the *Pandect*, 'On Faith'; PG 89:1433C–1436D, and is woven together from various passages from the *Divine Names*.
 65. Antiochus, *Pandect* 1; PG 89:1792A–B, drawing on Dionysius, *Ep.* 8.1; 171, 10–172, 3.
 66. Antiochus, *Pandect* 122; PG 89:1812A, quoting Dionysius, *EH* 1.iii; 65, 24–66, 1; 66, 4–6, and *CH* 7.1; 27, 10–11.
 67. *Archierosyne* is also found in the previous quotation, but in that case it follows the text of Dionysius, where it refers to the claims of Moses' opponents to the Jewish office of archpriest. Cf. note 62 above on *archiereus* in John of Scythopolis.
 68. Dionysius is not, however, consistent in this; he seems to allow for direct illumination on at least one occasion, the contemplation of the mystery of the *myron* by all the clergy (not just the hierarchy; *EH* 4.iii.2; 97, 12–14) and perhaps elsewhere.
 69. *Pandect* PG 89:1816B–D, from Dionysius, *CH* 3.1–2; 17, 3–19, 2, with gaps.
 70. *Pandect* 123; PG 89:1817D–1820B, from Dionysius, *Ep.* 8.1; 178, 8–180, 3.
 71. Cf. note 56 above.
 72. The most up-to-date and even-handed overview of the reconstruction of Maximus' life is Blowers (2016, 25–63).
 73. Sherwood contributed a section on this topic in Rayez (1957, 295–300); see also Louth (1993, 2008b, 590–3) and Andia (2015).
 74. Constan (2017), with references to previous bibliography; quotation is from p. 2.
 75. *Ibid.*, 7–9; cf. Portaru (2013, esp. 286–8).
 76. Maximus' emphasis on the virtue of *idiopragia* in *Mystagogy* 24 (Boudignon 2011, 69.1139–40) may be an allusion to Dionysius' *Ep.* 8, which in most manuscripts bears the title *περί [αλ. ὑπὲρ] ἰδιοπραγίας καὶ χρηστότητος* (Heil and Ritter 2012, 171.apparatus). The title, however, may not go back to Dionysius himself, and the word is not found in the body of the epistle. Even though the title was likely in place by Maximus' time, in this passage he does not develop his thought along Dionysian lines.
 77. *Mystagogy* Proem (Boudignon 2011, 6–7.54–74). Maximus, furthermore, claims simply to be passing on the teaching of a certain great

elder whom both he and his addressee heard expounding the interpretation of the liturgy. Many scholars have wished to identify this great elder as Sophronius of Jerusalem, while others see him as simply a literary device; see Nikolaou (1983).

78. Cf. Golitzin (2013, 380–3).
79. This is how intellectual advances occurred in late antiquity in general: see Ch. 2, “Philosophy, Exegesis, and Creative Mistakes” in Hadot (1995, 71–7).
80. Golitzin (2013, 294–8).
81. *Centuries on Love* 2.21 (Ceresa-Gastaldo 1963, 100; trans. Sherwood 1955, 156).
82. Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *EH* 2.iii.6; 2.iii.8; 4.iii.10–11; 5.i.6; 6.iii.5 (77, 8–23; 78, 14–21; 102, 8–22; 108, 5–109, 12; 119, 8–10). Maximus’ changes (for example, having deacons anoint the baptisands, rather than priests as in Dionysius) may reflect a different liturgical tradition.
83. I use the modifiers ‘proper’ and ‘minor’ here advisedly, since this is the categorization of these writings according to the present state of the printed texts, the obsolete *editio prima* by Combefis (PG 91). In fact, many of the works in the second group are written in the form of letters and many of those in the first group are theological treatises (and in both cases many of them are substantial, not ‘minor,’ tracts). For a brief overview of the problems of transmission and categorization of these two groups, see Booth and Jankowiak (2015, 22–23); and for a more general overview of the categories of Maximus’ writings, see Van Deun (2015, 274–86). These writings are neglected, partly due to the lack of critical editions; in the absence of dedicated studies, the introductions by Jean-Claude Larchet in Ponsoye (1998a, 7–62; 1998b, 7–108) are quite useful.
84. *Ep.* 30–31, along with other passages dealt with more briefly here, have been discussed with reference to the doctrine of the priesthood by Cooper (2001).
85. PG 91:624–25. All renderings are my own, as there is no English translation of the various letters discussed here. Sherwood (1952, 27–8), basing his reconstruction on the Greek traditions of Maximus’ life, dated the letters c. 626–632 and identified John as (arch)bishop of Cyzicus, assuming that *Ep.* 8, 28, and 29 (which have different, possibly corrupt attributions in various manuscripts), were also addressed to the same recipient, and arguing that Maximus was asking John for help in returning to his monastery in the vicinity of Constantinople after the defeat of the combined Avar-Persian siege of 626. Booth and Jankowiak (2015, 41–2), using the Syriac ‘Anti-Life’ of Maximus, also see these texts as a related group and date them to the latter end of Sherwood’s

- range (c.632), but hesitate to identify all the addressees as the same John of Cyzicus, and suggest that the recipients are in Palestine and that the barbarians in question are Arab raiders.
86. PG 91:624B–D. He concludes by repeating the idea that John has, by imitating the Lord by the grace of the Spirit, rendered himself another Christ to the beholders. Note the persistence of visual imagery.
 87. PG 91:625A.
 88. PG 91:625B. The epistle concludes with an appeal to John to either heal Maximus, as an injured member (of the ecclesiastical body) or to at least comfort him by prayer, ‘which is also proper to divine and true priesthood’ (PG 91:625D).
 89. Dionysius, *Ep.* 10; 209, 8–10. Cf. *EH* 3.iii.14; 94, 8: *helioeidōs* (cited above with reference to the need for clergy to be illumined before illumining others).
 90. The term in Dionysius is so common that, in lieu of citations, I refer the reader to van den Daele (1941, 61) *s.v.*
 91. *Ep.* 8; 182, 6–8.
 92. *EH* 2.iii.6; 77, 9–23, and 7.iii.8; 129, 14–22. The baptismal connection of *agon* is more obvious in the passage from Maximus’ *Centuries on Love* discussed above.
 93. Dionysius, however, uses the verb *θεόω* rather than *θεοποιέω*: cf. *EH* 1.ii; 65, 3–4, and *EH* 1.iv; 66, 20–1. Note the precedent in Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 2.73 (Bernardi 1978, 186.17–18).
 94. *DN* 2.9; 134, 2. Maximus seems to play on (or stretch) the parallel of fire subsuming what is ‘under it’ to with ‘things under the same nature’; the latter might be better translated ‘things categorized [or predicated] under the same nature.’ On the Neoplatonic background of *sympatheia*, Dionysius’ qualified use of it, and the liturgical context, see Rorem (1984, 134–8).
 95. *Hierosyne* is used only once by Dionysius, with reference to the role of the hierarchy at *EH* 1.II; 64, 7; but it is perhaps significant that he places priesthood there in a context of ethical, even ascetical, excellence.
 96. Booth and Jankowiak (2015, 26), although see the caveat in note 97 below.
 97. *Op.* 1; PG 91:9–38, is also addressed to Marinus as priest, but contains a much briefer introduction expressing Maximus’ idea of the priesthood, so for the sake of brevity I have excluded it here. *Op.* 2–3 (40–56) are to the same Marinus, according to the superscriptions in the PG text, but seem to be excerpts, without any introduction or conclusion, and thus are not germane to the discussion here.
 98. *Ep.* 20; PG 91:597B–604B.
 99. PG 91:597d; the letter is thus probably to be dated to before their first meeting in person.

100. *Opusc.* 7; PG 91:69B: μύστα καὶ μυσταγωγὲ μυστηρίων. Just before this, Maximus calls Marinus πανάγιε Θεοῦ θεράπον; perhaps the term *therapon* recalls Marinus' monastic foundations, as an echo of Dionysius' alternative term for a monk, *therapeutes*. The mention of priesthood (τῆς κατὰ σὲ θείας ἱερωσύνης εἰκονίζει τὸ ἔργον) is at PG 91:72b.
101. *Opusc.* 7; PG 91:69C–72A.
102. *Opusc.* 7; PG 91:72B.
103. Cf. note 79 above. For the various configurations of the triad purification-illumination-perfection (or union) in Dionysius, see Mainoldi (2018, 240–57); studies of Maximus tend to neglect his (admittedly somewhat rare) use of the Dionysian triad in favor of the Evagrian scheme of *praxis-theoria-theologia* (e.g. Thunberg 1965, 352–396). In the passage here, Marinus is also ascribed an illuminating role (PG 91:72a). The parallel to the Dionysian triad of clerical functions can be maintained (albeit with a stretch) if we recall that Dionysius notes that catechumens, possessed, and penitents are allowed to listen to the liturgical psalms and scripture readings, which convey at least some illumination (Pseudo-Dionysius, *EH* III.iii.6; 84, 25–85, 1).
104. *Opusc.* 7; PG 91:69B.
105. *Opusc.* 20; PG 91:228C–229A.
106. *kruphiomystou siges* at *MTh* 1.1 (142.2); *polyphonos* at *MTh* 1.3; 144, 1, although the use of the word at *DN* 2.4 (Suchla, 1990, 127.1) may be more apposite to Maximus' employment of it here. Maximus' amplifies Dionysius' positive adjective to a superlative. For similar language see *Mystagogy* 4 (Boudignon 2011, 19.279–281), which also quotes from *DN* 4.22 (Suchla 1990, 170.4–5).
107. *EH* 5.i.7; 109, 13–110, 5.
108. This instance was not noticed by Constan (2017, n. 34).
109. *Opusc.* 20; PG 91:245C.
110. Cf. Booth (2014, 261, n. 38).
111. Lampe (1961, 669) (s.v. ἱεραρχικός and ἱεραρχικῶς).
112. See van den Daele (1941) s.v. (56, 17, 147, 77, 94, 122, 97, 134). Note also that Maximus' 'the shadowless light of the Father' (*to askion phos kai patrikon*) recalls *CH* 1.2 (7.9), on the significance of which see Golitzin (2013, 15–16).
113. *Op.* 10; PG 91:133–137, and *Op.* 1; PG 91:9–37 are also addressed to Marinus, as a priest, according to the superscription(s) in the manuscripts (Booth and Jankowiak 2015, 49–50). Maximus introduces both with praise of Marinus' virtue and knowledge, but without general commentary on the priestly function of guiding others, hence I have omitted discussion of them here. For the doubtful attribution of *Op.* 2 and 3; PG 91:40–56 to Marinus, see Booth and Jankowiak (2015, 61); in

- any case, these are excerpts from another work(s) and begin in mid-stream, without any personal references.
114. Sherwood (1952) commenting on *Epistle* 21 to the bishop of Cydonia.
 115. For the classical background see Ahl (1984, esp. 197–205). As he points out, citing Plutarch, such ‘figured speech’ is not safer, but also usually more effective, even with friends (197). See also Pernot (1993, 710–24); and for late antiquity see Brown (1994) and the various contributions in Whitby (1998).
 116. I take this to be the significance of the particularly extravagant praise in Maximus’ letter to Pyrrhus (*Ep.* 19, PG 91:589–597, esp. at 589C–592C); cf. Larchet in Ponsoye (1998a, 28).
 117. As part of this trope, he often emphasizes that, despite his unworthiness and inability, he writes out of obedience to the command of his recipient or some other superior (see, for example, the aforementioned *Ep.* 20 to Marinus, at PG 91:597D); this is a common justification in monastic authors. Maximus’ employment of the humility trope in letters to socio-political superiors is not exactly of the same nature.
 118. This theme is especially prominent in *Epistle* 21, to the bishop of Cydonia; PG 91:603B–606B, where it is developed in a Christological context. See also *Ep.* 6, to archbishop John; PG 91:424–433, esp. 424C–D, *Ep.* 13 to Peter the illustis; PG 91:509–533, at 509C–512A, and *Ep.* 2 and 4 to the imperial chamberlain John; PG 91:400 and 417–420.
 119. Cf. *DN* 4.10; 155, 8–13. Humility is briefly mentioned in relation to Christ’s incarnation at *EH* 3.iii.11–12; 91, 8–14 and 93, 1–3.
 120. For another comment by Maximus on proper order within the church, see his solution to a crux found in Acts 21:4ff. (regarding the apostle Paul’s disobeying a prophecy), in *Responses to Thalassius* 29 (Laga and Steel 1980, 210–15), where he deploys the Pauline doctrine of charisms and their relative priority—a more scriptural and more flexible model of church order than Dionysius’ hierarchy, but recapitulated in Dionysian language in the concluding lines (*ibid.*, 215, 67–72), discussed by Cooper (2001, 356–7).
 121. For a recent overview of this history, see Booth (2014, 186–328) and, more narrowly on hierarchy and Rome, see Cooper (2001, 356–65).
 122. *Ep.* 2.3, Courtonne (1957 1, 9, 28–35).
 123. Sterk (2004) and Rapp (2005). These authors themselves, however, barely mention Dionysius, thus neglecting an important spokesman for the ideal that they analyse. But for tensions between monastic and episcopal hagiography in the middle Byzantine period, see Efthymiadis (2012).
 124. The addressee’s liturgical role is referred to, for example, in Maximus’ praise of Marinus for his ‘diligence with regard to the sacred rites’, in

- the passage quoted above from *Opusc.* 20; PG 91:228C–229A (see n. 105). The interpretation of the first entrance of the bishop into the church building and his subsequent proceeding to the sanctuary and sitting on the throne as a ‘type and image’ of Christ’s incarnation, ascension, and session at the right hand of the Father, in *Mystagogy* 8 (Boudignon 2011, 37.604–19), is a suggestive but isolated instance of a more integrated vision of clergy within the liturgy. His designation of the bishop as ‘image’ of God in *Epistles* 30–31 might also be enriched by interpreting it in light of the dominant theme of the *Mystagogy*, of the Church as image of God; see the programmatic statement at *Mystagogy* 1 (Boudignon 2011, 12–13.163–87), especially for its emphasis on the correspondence of activity (*energeia*) between God and his image, the Church (and for the importance of *energeia* in the Areopagite and in the mature Byzantine theology of images, see the contribution by Mainoldi in the present volume). For a positive assessment of Maximus’ integration of sacramental and ascetical theology, see Booth (2014, 139–85).
125. Dionysius even suggests to Demophilus that, if he manages to put the house of his own soul in order, he will be able then to govern others, in *Ep.* VIII, 3:1093B; 183, 4–10.
126. For the quotations see notes 10 and 15 above. On the need for true interpretation and imitation of the images of episcopal hierarchy, with reference especially to Dionysius and Maximus, see Koutloumousianos (2018, 294–318).

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Images of Holy Men in Late Antiquity in Light of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite: Framing Spiritual Ascent and Visualising Spiritual Hierarchy

Katherine Marsengill

The purpose of this chapter is first to discuss how conceptions of supernatural mediation, divine revelation, and spiritual ascent were prevalent in Late Antiquity. The goal is to show how the Christian reception of these concepts as epitomised in the hierarchies of Pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite can be seen reflected in images of holy men in Late Antiquity. To this end, I will demonstrate that Christian images accommodated a complex interpretation of hierarchy as a way to visualise the incremental revelation of the Divine to man, provide a kind of visibility to God's mediation, and depict hierarchy as the means of man's spiritual ascent to God. I will begin with a description of the religious environment of Christians in Late Antiquity, both popularly and at philosophic levels, as a way to understand the concepts of divine mediation and spiritual revelation in its broader context. I will then focus on Pseudo-Dionysius'

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texts, in particular in order to demonstrate how many of the ideas he expressed relate to these conceptions about the structure of the natural and supernatural worlds, and by what means the realms were traversed in one's path to God. I will discuss visual evidence from the sixth century for examples of how images of holy men functioned in light of hierarchy as it is described by Pseudo-Dionysius.

SUPERNATURAL AND SPIRITUAL 'HIERARCHY' IN LATE ANTIQUITY

It is well established that in Late Antiquity, Christians acknowledged saints, martyrs, and living holy men as mediators who arbitrated with the divine and supernatural forces and worked miracles in the name of God on behalf of the faithful.¹ As has also been established, there was in addition all sorts of 'other' intercessory help available if one needed to influence the supernatural realm, for this was a world still thoroughly in touch with the lesser gods, the *daimons*, and with ancestors listening to the pleas of the living from the other side of the tomb.² For Christians still living in an atmosphere infused with the old gods, there seems to have been a fairly common belief, not unlike what was prevalent among their non-Christian neighbours, that God existed at the zenith of (or perhaps altogether beyond) a spectrum of lesser gods, whose powers were still acknowledged. Among pagans at the time, there was, for example, a belief in a supreme God that existed above other supernatural forces, though there were certainly distinctions between the philosophic monotheism, whereby lesser divinities were emanations of the One, and cultic, or popular henotheism, whereby the myriad gods were lesser sub-entities of a supreme god.³ Late antique Judaism, too, had its own degree of acceptance that God was the supreme deity reigning in heaven over various lesser divinities below. This notion was pervasive enough to have been absorbed into what we might call a Christian supernatural or spiritual geography based on hierarchy, if not hierarchy per se. A hierarchical arrangement in this context refers to a loose perception of the existence of intermediate levels between material existence and the Divine. The results were such that many Christians acknowledged the gods and other lesser spiritual forces, even if often (though not uniformly) understood as *daimons* rather than deities (for there were early Christian, heretical sects that admitted pagan deities).⁴

This influence on early Christianity is one upon which more and more scholars are working to explain, expounding upon the idea that early

Christianity, like ancient Judaism, often modelled pagan henotheism in many ways, though the sources are ambiguous and conflicting on this point. Much of the problem derives from assuming, like in the problematic application of the notion of 'paganism' to religiously pluralistic Roman society, that there was one Christianity, uniform in its developments and practices over the entire, diverse Roman Empire. It seems to have been sorted out, if not without substantial debate and ongoing resistance, with the promulgation of the doctrine of the Trinity, though this, too, needed distinguishing from polytheism by Church Fathers. The seamless admittance of angels and demons, whose existences were not denied, as well as the growing cult of saints and *loca sancta* as holy touchstones mediating the earthly and heavenly realms no doubt also aided in overcoming conflicting beliefs about residual pagan divinities while introducing another means of supernatural mediation.⁵

Adding to this complex picture, scholarly opinion about the relationship between pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity is undergoing a tremendous change. Many are now describing a less polemicised and violent atmosphere than what is reflected in the texts, and a greater degree of participation by Christians in pagan civic festivals and other traditional rites.⁶ It is possible that many who identified as Christians retained belief in pagan gods, as well as invested in the possibility that these deities could intercede. An example may exist in the case of Pegasius, who was recommended in a letter written by Emperor Julian. Pegasius had remained custodian to a temple and the pagan images within it even while he was a Christian bishop of Galilee; he had worshiped Helios in secret and had defended the worship of the ancient hero, Hector, as akin to the veneration of Christian martyrs ('Is it not natural that they should worship a brave man who was their own citizen, just as we worship the martyrs?').⁷ Perhaps his Christianity was a false belief, or indicative of a person who can adjust according to which way the wind was blowing. However, if we allow for grey areas in the still quite nebulous Christianity, it is also possible that his attitude may have reflected a not uncommon understanding of the various existing supernatural powers.

What the late antique atmosphere offered pagans and Christians alike amounted to practices that reflected a spectrum of supernatural powers that mediated between a remote, supreme deity and the everyday needs of regular people. For practical purposes, many Christians felt it was sufficient in earthly matters (spiritual matters belonging to the Christian God's domain) to rely upon those supernatural beings and lesser deities

that existed above the earth and under the moon. And not just supernatural forces, but also intimates that people knew, including esteemed teachers (especially among the philosophers and scholastics), as well as one's more closely situated deceased family. It was quite normal to beseech relatives who had passed on, or teachers and mentors who had demonstrated themselves to be spiritually adept for their aid,⁸ especially when it came to influencing mundane events, when the court of heaven lay so far from one's reach. This is not an uncommon functional system in the history of world religions. As Max Weber describes, the religious laity's consistent need was 'for an accessible and tangible familiar object which could be brought into relationship with concrete life situations'.⁹ I introduce this perception of the availability of intercessory powers in order to situate the use of images as visual components into this matrix, as will become clear.

This need for access to the supernatural through what was familiar was not mere superstition, or the practicalities of a working, popular system for the laity. Rather, such views reflected perceptions at every intellectual level about the structure of the cosmos and its bearing on the immaterial and material worlds. The means of access was structured in order to incorporate visual and tangible materiality and progress towards greater degrees of abstract and intellectual or spiritual contemplation. Indeed, the antique cosmos was understood as arranged as a kind of upward progression, which provided the model for intellectuals, the educated and common people to understand the physical and supernatural worlds.¹⁰ The Christian ecclesiastical elite—many of whom were well versed in philosophy—and laity—many of whom were recent converts in a religion that was in any case not yet unified and still riddled with what would be deemed unorthodox sects—did not change this fundamental perception about the order of the universe and its inhabitants, both natural and supernatural, which was embedded in their very culture.¹¹ They, too, perceived God as unknowable and unseeable except through the outward signs, the Incarnation, the saints, and so on.

However, part of the transformation of this embedded perception into a Christian scheme was the transferal of such supernatural investment to the safekeeping of Christian leaders and exemplars who could act as intercessors on behalf of the faithful.¹² The reason for this derived from the prevalent conception of God as incomprehensible, unknowable, and remote. Plato's declaration that God does not mix with man, but converses with man through spiritual intermediaries¹³ was relevant to late

antique Christians who were living long after Christ's Incarnation and Ascension. Christians, too, described God as necessarily ineffable to man and thus necessitating God's mediation. In this sense, it is easy to understand the reciprocal relationship between the cultic function of hierarchy, whether or not defined with this term, and hierarchy as the organising structure of cult. This was a world where one did not expect the hand of God would reach directly down to the common man, but instead His Goodness flowed down to earthly inhabitants via holy beings (including living representatives), places, substances, and images. A late antique Christian could, for example, make pilgrimage and with utmost expression of piety pray to the relics of more famous saints, like the superhuman stylites of late antique Syria. Whether yet living or present only through relics, their tall columns made clear their metaphysical situation between earth and heaven. Even still, the healing wished for or the remedy for illness often came from the dust, oil, and earth, associated with these sites, the magically infused substances that held the spiritual charge of the saint, or his image carried on a pilgrim's token or icon¹⁴—in other words, a mediating of saints' powers occurred even within the mediation of the saints. It was a necessary function for the efficacy of the faith that Christianity admitted within its framework a range of intermediaries, arranged in such a way that may be described as hierarchically. However, this is not to suggest that there were strict formulae or precise roles in place to structure the means of mediation. What allowed such a system of faith to work was its inherent possibility, the spark of imagination such possibilities excited in the faithful, and the possibilities open to interpretations according to the spiritual aptitude or devotion of the individual.

More so than even the highly charged contact relics and sacred geographies of the most famous holy men of the time, however, it was local figures who could be seen as directly involved and committed to the communal faithful while they were living and who were considered especially effective in this regard after their death. Tangible, familiar, local—these are concepts that resonated with the laity when they wished to address the sacred or unseen forces. That said, certainly bishops' efforts to elevate the urban and suburban cults of holy martyrs reflected their interests in impressing the saints' familiar, local, and visible presence upon their communities and pilgrims; such actions also made clear the special intimacy shared between the bishops and their saints, which functioned to place them in a spectrum of mediation, precisely between the elevated saints and their earthly communities.¹⁵ Beyond the outstanding

cults of holy men, the athletes of Christ atop pillars and in desert hermitages, often in mountain caves that demonstrated their spiritual elevation as if physical reality, I would argue that one's visualisation of the spiritual availability from the 'other' world would more frequently dwell upon countenances within recent memory or even of those one knew or had known personally, especially for use in personal matters, just as the more renowned martyrs became increasingly civic in their functions. It is important to realise, as described by Weber, the needs of the community to have access to the supernatural realm at hand by means of clear paths and legacies within Christian histories. In this way, the rise of the saintly bishops comes into greater focus, as well as, and as part of, apostolic succession.¹⁶ John Chrysostom's words about how the citizens of Antioch were having images of their deceased Bishop Meletius painted on walls and depicted on the bezels of their rings, so that his familiar features would be a comfort to his congregation fit accordingly into a pattern of personal and local intercessory spiritual leaders.¹⁷ More than likely, there were countless cults dedicated to local holy persons that ceased to exist after a generation or two and that are now lost to us.¹⁸ These are the kinds of activities that could gain greater purchase, however, and result in establishing a renowned saint.

We also see in Meletius' example the use of portraits of him by the Antiochene faithful, something that was not ostensibly embraced by pagan Neoplatonism.¹⁹ These were certainly made in order to help his followers visualise him. Moreover, if we take as further indication the words of Gregory of Nyssa's funerary panegyric on Meletius, wherein he calls Meletius an intercessor for his congregation in heaven, such images could also provide visual access to him as a source of mediation on their behalf.²⁰ The presence of a local holy person—whether martyr, bishop, monk, or nearby ascetic, whether living or dead—not only strengthened the perceived availability of spiritual power, it also helped make tangible the means of its access; and images (not discounting the importance of architectural environments, sanctified and activated sacred spaces, ritual, devotion, etc.) made such mysterious workings graspable to the faithful. In practice, local saints demonstrated for the faithful participation in the divine. But more than this, their images arranged in a spectrum of mediation that, as we will see, often emphasised vertical relationships between figures, reflected the growing understanding of the Christian conceptual path between earth and heaven as one based on ascent, and the belief that various beings are ranked according to their places in this

ascent towards the Divine. This is what Pseudo-Dionysius described in his hierarchies.²¹

These concepts of a spiritual hierarchy as the organising principle for divine intermediation and the notion of spiritual ascent through the hierarchy provided the fertile ground from which Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's writings sprang. His texts elaborately describe the various hierarchies while perfectly conceptualising the *purpose* of hierarchy.²² As he and other late antique Christians understood it, the distance dividing common people from the saints, and their varying spiritual participation in God, and the ranks of angels according to their degree of proximity to the Divine, was spanned by incremental levels of being that depended not only upon the idea of an ordered universe, but also relied upon an arrangement precisely designed to assist in bridging the gap between human and Divine. For humans, there is inherent to the concept of hierarchy the idea that there were some men who were more enlightened, higher—closer to the Divine and closer to being divine—than others, some because they had worked hard at it, and others due to charisma or some superior innate ability bestowed by God's grace.²³ What we find repeated in Christian texts of the period, and in those of Pseudo-Dionysius, is the notion that some men are simply more capable of understanding the highest levels of God and his creation. Therefore, if they have indeed committed their lives to this endeavour, they rank among the highest of beings, both in this life and in the afterlife. Still, this was a process that admitted a range or spectrum of spiritual attainment. In fact, one's place in the hierarchy was greatly determined by one's capacity to receive knowledge of the Divine, which referred to one's innate or earned ability to contemplate the mystery of the ineffable Divine and accept its mysterious ineffability. To this end, Pseudo-Dionysius makes ample use of the term 'proportionate' (κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν) to refer to degrees of enlightenment that conforms to the individual's ontological rank as well as his abilities to receive or comprehend what has been portioned out.²⁴ Although Pseudo-Dionysius, like Neoplatonists before him, writes very generally about the capacity of individuals to receive knowledge of the Divine and the notion of proportionate revelation of the Divine rather than relying upon a system of precise terms, there can be no doubt that this is fundamental to his theology and to his hierarchies.²⁵ It is clear that one's innate capacity and one's ascetic or spiritual discipline were dependent upon one another to determine the degree of enlightenment that could be attained.

This notion, too, was indebted to the perception of non-Christian holy men. In Late Antiquity, among some non-Christians (and even some Christians), such enlightened men—usually philosophers, and also those who merged philosophy with theurgy to become wonder-workers—were identified as divinised human beings. Both deceased and living philosophers who were perceived to be spiritually and intellectually advanced were also teachers with disciples and followers, and their portraits were apparently venerated, even though many philosophers would have eschewed the body and therefore its portrayal as useless material.²⁶ Some Christian theologians, in certain schools of thought, also elevated those considered spiritually advanced and saw the potential transformation of the human condition, the deification of humans, through spiritual advancement.²⁷ There is evidence that many early Christians venerated portraits of those who had achieved higher levels of holiness or sainthood. Later, these became holy icons, though, as will be discussed below, not only saints but also many recognised for their elevated status were venerated in images, as well, especially during the early centuries of Christianity.²⁸

This seemingly problematic behaviour of venerating spiritually advanced persons, or holy men who were not sainted, becomes less contentious if we understand that many early theologians made particular efforts to explain the gradual and difficult processes involved in spiritual ascent, relying on metaphors such as ladders, mountains, and—perhaps most hierarchic in terms of defining the relation of humans to one another—chains or ropes stretched between heaven and earth. Origen, Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Maximus the Confessor, and John Climacus, for example, all use ladders and mountains, whereas Pseudo-Dionysius also relies upon the chain.²⁹ As such theologians make clear, and a point that I have already suggested, not every Christian reaches the same degree of enlightenment within his or her lifetime; this is the nature of spiritual ascent. Some reached the very topmost tiers of spiritual perfection, while others remained at the bottom. And there were also myriad levels in between, which accounts for the inclusion of those who could be considered spiritually elevated and therefore efficacious as mediators, if not among the highest of saints, who were often a quite elite group of apostles, martyrs, and extreme ascetics. In this sense, the elevation of many bishops to sainthood, as well as sainted and quasi-sainted monks and ascetics of Late Antiquity may be seen as filling a bit of a gap. There is plenty of written evidence to

attest to living intercessory figures and their followers, who treated them as venerable after their death that has been discussed by historians of Christianity in Late Antiquity. It is a point that I will further clarify in my discussion of how the visual evidence supports this perception of ‘non-sainted’ holy men (or those whose holiness did not extend to a broader recognition of sainthood).

LATE ANTIQUE CHRISTIAN PORTRAITS IN LIGHT OF PSEUDO-DIONYSIAN HIERARCHY

Pseudo-Dionysius’s texts, *On the Divine Names*, and his *Celestial* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies* reflect the core of the Christian notion of hierarchy and its importance to mankind. Pseudo-Dionysius had a profound understanding of hierarchy as both a force that bound and united the various levels of God’s universe and also provided the means to traverse the distance between man and God. But hierarchy was not immutable. Rather it was understood as the *process* of spiritual perfection.³⁰ Even sainthood was a progression. Maximus the Confessor, one of the earliest commentators on Pseudo-Dionysius, explains how holy men, despite having already been marked for sainthood at early ages, still made journeys through levels of spiritual attainment that resulted in their ultimate unification with the Divine.³¹ Early hagiography certainly reflects the notion as saints move through typical and recognisable stages.³² The signs indicating their sainthood lay in such stories. Yet the integrity of the process, whether understood as ascent or stages, was a condition that also permitted the recognition of those who were at these intermediate stages of holiness and those who had attained different levels of sainthood. It is not altogether unrelated that Paulinus of Nola described how saints, just like stars in a night sky, differ in their radiance.³³ Even among the saints it was difficult to deny there was a hierarchy, that some were superior to others.

Thus, hierarchy was not just the organising principle that God created to bridge the degrees of distance between the Divinity, angels, and man—indeed, the way in which he reveals Himself by degrees and according to the capacity of each; hierarchy was also understood as the means of ascent. It is evident in Pseudo-Dionysius that the hierarchy exists also to assist all beings in their ascent according to their places in the hierarchy. In other words, beings at every level are enjoined to share and guide those below them. Pseudo-Dionysius writes that those who

have reached the highest levels of spiritual pursuits to abide in the Divine, exemplify goodness and, 'as the Law of God requires of them, they share with those below them the good gifts which have come their way'.³⁴ This is a crucial point, if somewhat contradictory. Ideally, participation in the Divine is direct and requires no intermediaries. Yet those participating in the Divine at greater degrees and capacities than those lower in the hierarchy provide not just exemplary models of progressive illumination; they can, in fact, be viewed as a kind of revelation of the Divine, their souls and bodies transformed accordingly.³⁵ Thus, though theoretically unnecessary for spiritual ascent, the practicalities of cult that understood God as unreachable except through his mediators, as described above in terms of both paganism and the development of Christianity, coupled with the abundant evidence for such cult activity in the veneration of spiritually advanced people, suggest that such people were indeed considered mediators, whether in imparting knowledge of the Divine or in fact presenting the needs of followers to the court of heaven, as Gregory of Nyssa describes in the passage cited above. Indeed, there is the practical relationship of the spiritual leader and disciple, the mentor and follower, that comprises the foundation of Christian spirituality.

In Pseudo-Dionysius' concept of the universe, the very nature of existence is one of unity and differentiation, oneness and multiplicity, and the purpose of everything created is to uplift the multiplicity and bring it back to the One.³⁶ How this is accomplished is the revelation of God in all things he created, through which he also necessarily conceals, or hides himself. Everyone, then, has the potential to reveal God, though the closer to God and the more filled with Good one is, the more capable one is of conveying God to those around one. How all things, all intellectual beings, are arranged in order to facilitate divine revelation is, according to Pseudo-Dionysius, the nature of hierarchy. In his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, we learn that the Church emulates the celestial hierarchy, mirrors the progression of the soul, and exists to serve the same purpose of aiding those who exist within and below the hierarchy.³⁷ Thus, the earthly hierarchy reflects the celestial, and all of it exists for the purpose of aiding man's ascent through these intermediate stages and with the help of others who have achieved higher spirituality.

With this in mind, we turn to the visual evidence. When discussing the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on artistic production, much has been discussed around the interpretation and implementation of abstract 'signs' of divinity in the creation of sacred space and art. However, as

Niketas Siniossoglou explains in the context of Neoplatonic esotericism, the nature of negative theology did not adequately accommodate the exoteric needs of a 'workaday mass religion', which required contact with the supernatural realm, even while—or especially because—the highest God remained ineffable.³⁸ In other words, for most people outside the monastic and ecclesiastical orders, abstract and multivalent visualisations of God, as one would encounter in Pseudo-Dionysian analogic theology, needed the support of more concrete visualisation. As I argue here, portraits of holy men who may not have attained sainthood in late antique Christian art fulfilled that desire to reach God by presenting these elevated humans as accessible and recognisable intermediaries.

Unfortunately, and despite the theological importance of hierarchy in Late Antiquity, the term 'hierarchy' when applied to art has a burden of social negativity, one that has been used to describe Byzantine culture, in particular, as based on autocracy. Through this lens, much of Byzantine art has been seen as a reflection of its assumed autocratic imperial system.³⁹ For example, the apse mosaic of San Vitale in Ravenna dated to around 545 (Fig. 5.1) can be interpreted as the presentation of a heavenly realm that resembles the imperial court, but instead consisting of an enthroned Christ and his chosen few, in this case, angels, the martyred Saint Vitalis, and a bishop-donor—Ecclesius—offering his gift and securing his place in the afterlife. However, an interpretation that sees the apse mosaic in isolation, only as a glimpse from below of the unreachable and exclusive heavenly court, may be a view based on a modern understanding of empire and autocracy rather than on sixth-century notions of hierarchy.

In terms of imperial hierarchy and in the transposition of imperial iconography within Christian imagery, both need and are undergoing some adjustment. It cannot be denied that Byzantine Christian art is related to imperial art, if within a more complicated relationship than previously supposed.⁴⁰ However, the concept behind the late antique ruler and the ruling class may not have been as simple as we tend to interpret it, either, with such unilateral exclusivity and fixed remoteness of the emperor and court. Not only did the emperor have frequent interaction with his environs and people and was conceived as a living, divine mediator, as Siniossoglou also points out, the hierarchal order of the late antique Empire was reflective of an essentially practical, even henotheistic hierarchy whereby the emperor was 'god of gods', 'king of kings', over those who governed under him, and so on down the chain of authority, leaving



Fig. 5.1 Christ enthroned with angels, Saint Vitalis, and Bishop Ecclesius, mosaic, c.547, Ravenna, Church of San Vitale, apse (*Photo credit* Katherine Marsengill)

many others to act as intermediaries. If the emperor was in actuality remote—especially in the view of anyone outside of the capital—then there were numerous other means of access to more immediate resources of aid: lesser courts, local governors and church men, etc., as well as supernatural the powers of the saints, images (including the emperor’s image), and so on.⁴¹ In this system also lay civic and religious ritual and veneration to promote feelings of accessibility and placation on behalf of the self and community.

The imperial lens used to analyse Byzantine Christian art has been faulty in its presumption of recreating in its presentation of heaven and heavenly figures a situation wherein the ruler establishes a two-tiered hierarchy instead of a stepped or gradual hierarchy. Thus, in past scholars’ estimation, the apse imagery in San Vitale by its comparison to an imperial model elevates those presented there to an extent that there would be no intermediate levels by which one may even hope to access the highest levels of the either imperial court of supernatural realm. This is not, I would argue, how Pseudo-Dionysius, nor contemporary

audiences would have viewed such programmes, nor what the authors of visual programmes intended. The apse at San Vitale, like various examples from this period, functioned in relation to other images, within an environment of the living and in conjunction to the performance of the liturgy. The image of the recently deceased Bishop Ecclesius in the apse should not be seen *merely* as a donor portrait within the context of ecclesiastical civic euergetism and patronage,⁴² nor as something so simple as a proclamation of or aspiration to his elevation to the heavenly court (he was, despite later confusion about his status, not a saint).⁴³ The recognisable features of a bishop, whether still living or of recent memory, placed as pendant to the Ravennate saint, Vitalis, rather situates him—and Ravenna—as part of this hierarchal ascent that reaches from the specific location of the church and its congregants to the eternal realm of heaven presided over by Christ, thereby overcoming the gap between the local Christians and the heavenly court. Ecclesius and Vitalis are successive rungs in the ladder of holiness; they visualise both the path and the potential of ascent. In this context, Christ's representation as enthroned on the globe and the eschatological significance of the seven-sealed scroll in His hand indicates both the eternity of the Supreme God who resides in heaven and the faithful's promised ascent to be with Him—if not now, as some of the more enlightened few have achieved through martyrdom or through holy appointment, then eventually, at the End of Times. The figure of Christ as Incarnate God further offers a sign and condescension of God revealed to man, assuring viewers of this reality.

In order to understand further how hierarchy was visualised in art as a spiritual progression with the purpose of uplifting viewers to God, we must also rethink some ideas about sainthood and holiness. For, if only two tiers existed, earthly and heavenly, non-sainted and sainted, the divide between the two ontological existences would be insuperable. Yet, as we see in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius as well as so many others that maintained a fundamental perception of the universe as one with numerous and hierarchically arranged intermediary forces, this was not acceptable. It was not the way God had intended it at all. For example, according to Pseudo-Dionysius, 'The goal of a hierarchy, then, is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at one with him... It ensures that when its members have received this full and divine splendor they can then pass on this light generously and in accordance with God's will to beings further down the scale....Therefore when the hierarchic order lays it on some to be purified and others to do the purifying,

on some to receive illumination and on others to cause illumination, on some to be perfected and on others to bring about perfection, each will actually imitate God in the way suitable to whatever role it has'.⁴⁴

Thus, in order to accommodate beings lower in the spiritual hierarchy, late antique Christianity recognised many levels of spiritual achievement that did not make sharp distinctions when considering potential sources of intercession between holy (or spiritually elevated) and sainted. Holy persons who existed above common mortals though were not recognised as saints are treated as such in individual works of art,⁴⁵ such as the panel of Apa Abraham from Bawit, Egypt, whose haloed portrait was likely painted during his lifetime, indeed around the year 600. The panel was obviously preserved as a holy icon, with all of the attendant associations of commemoration and veneration, even though Abraham was never officially a saint.⁴⁶ Although we will never know for certain, we can easily imagine that Apa Abraham was regarded by his monks much like the aforementioned Bishop Meletius had been by his community, as a familiar and accessible intercessor in heaven on their behalf. How such a portrait may have been used by viewers while he was still alive poses an intriguing question that is also unanswerable; nevertheless, one wonders if such portraits could be the focus of commemoration in line with the reading of diptychs during the liturgy, or possibly used in private veneration, as suggested by several wall paintings from Egyptian monasteries showing monks on their knees before images of abbots of the monastery. To provide one example of the latter, in a painting from Bawit, a secondary figure of a praying monk appears to have been added to a portrait of another, haloed monk, whose status is unclear, since so many monks were depicted haloed whether or not they were inscribed with the epithet designating sainthood. Indeed, many are given very humble inscriptions, even if portrayed next to figures whose images are inscribed with the word 'holy'.⁴⁷

Different levels of holiness can be discerned more clearly within larger artistic programmes, such as we see in the mosaic apse of the mid-sixth-century Church of Saint Catherine's at Mount Sinai. There, the bust portraits of two living monks are preserved among the framing medallion portraits of Christ's apostles surrounding the image of Christ's Metamorphosis (Figs. 5.2, 5.3, 5.4).⁴⁸ Stylistically, there is little to distinguish them from the other apostles, though they are given so-called square nimbi and a few distinct, portrait-like traits. Overall, however, it can be said that their portraits are more in accordance with an 'iconic'

presentation, with frontal bust-portraits that conform to the rest of the figures' appearances in the medallions: certainly recognisable, but not overtly unique. They are located at each corner with inscriptions naming them, Abbot John and Hegoumenos Longinus (the latter is mentioned in the dedicatory inscription at the bottom of the apse), who were most likely living at the time of the mosaic's creation and who, like Ecclesius, were also not recognised as saints after their deaths. Usually explained as portraits of overseers of the church's building, a kind of donor portrait, in fact there can be little doubt that they were perceived as holy within the monastic community by their inclusion here among the apostles. We know that monastic leaders served, and still serve today, as representatives of their communities and laity to God, and their prayers are seen as particularly efficacious. These monastic leaders were part of the hierarchy, higher in their spiritual attainment than the others, and were clearly set apart in images as one means of visualising this hierarchy. Moreover,



Fig. 5.2 The Transfiguration of Christ, mosaic, before 565, Sinai, Church of St. Catherine, apse (*Photo credit* by permission of Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt, courtesy of Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to Mount Sinai)



Fig. 5.3 Abbot Longinus, mosaic, before 565, Sinai, Church of St. Catherine, apse, detail (*Photo credit* by permission of Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt, courtesy of Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to Mount Sinai)

through their representations, we begin to understand that their images, too, could serve as points of access to the hierarchy. And, as in the case of Sinai's monks, as mortals whose capacity to understand the true



Fig. 5.4 Deacon John, mosaic, before 565, Sinai, Church of St. Catherine, apse, detail (*Photo credit* by permission of Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt, courtesy of Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to Mount Sinai)

divinity of Christ is greater than most, albeit indirectly revealed to them, they are placed among the portraits of apostles who were *not* present on Mount Tabor and yet were privy to the vision as secondary witnesses.⁴⁹

Their portraits, together with the apostles, frame the larger theophanic image in the apse, which represents, as Jás Elsner has shown, the epitome and aspiration of Pseudo-Dionysian spiritual ascent for the monastic community who endeavored to be witnesses to Christ as God.⁵⁰ The living monks portrayed as indirect visionaries are not saints, but they rank very high in the hierarchy of holiness because of their spiritual attainment in understanding the true meaning of theophany. The monks, no matter their role in the monastery or the building of the church, are clearly part of the pictorial programme and its larger meaning, not just additions.

There were several ways to manifest and make visually apparent spiritual ascent through the hierarchies. These follow what we find in major texts described in the first part of this chapter. Physical ascent was often used to manifest a holy person's spiritual ascent, which placed man above the earth and closer to heaven. Pseudo-Dionysius describes Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai in his *Mystical Theology* as a spiritual and physical ascent.⁵¹ Mountains, then, served as both a physical reality of heavenly altitudes as well as a metaphor for spiritual enlightenment on the top of which, when one reaches it, provides revelation of God. Thus, likely the use of the craggy though cleaved peak to show Moses atop Mount Sinai on the apsidal arch of the Church of Saint Catherine (Fig. 5.5) was to indicate that, though he had ascended the mountain, Moses' vision of God was not-yet-fulfilled; Moses only heard God and saw God's 'back' (Ex 33:19–23) since seeing God face-to-face was impossible until, in Christian estimation, the Incarnation made God visible (and Christ's Transfiguration revealed his Divinity in so far as his disciples had the capacity to see it with their human eyes). By contrast, the Metamorphosis of Christ atop of Mount Tabor, as depicted in the apse, levels the mountaintop, implying that the three witnesses there have reached the summit and seen first hand the theophany of Christ as God.⁵²

Another programme that Pseudo-Dionysius would have understood for its hierarchic concept can still be seen today in the apse mosaic of Sant' Apollinare in Classe (Fig. 5.6). The central image has been long identified as encapsulating the theophanic message of, if not narrating Christ's Metamorphosis on Mount Tabor, as it has also traditionally been explained to represent.⁵³ The shining, jewelled cross, with its clipeate portrait of Christ at its centre, is accompanied by three lambs, possibly the three apostles—Peter, James, and John. The true identifiers of



Fig. 5.5 Moses receiving the Law, mosaic, before 565, Sinai, Church of St. Catherine, triumphal arch (*Photo credit* by permission of Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt, courtesy of Father Justin of St. Catherine's Monastery)

the enigmatic and unique interpretation of the biblical event, or at least the visual translation of the experience of theophany, is the presence of the three figures who are represented anthropomorphically: Moses and Elijah to either side of the central cross, who are described appearing at Christ's Metamorphosis, and a local sainted bishop, Apollinaris, below the cross.⁵⁴ If the lambs are supposed to be Peter, James, and John, then it is worth noting that their ascent up the mountain with Christ, echoing Moses' climb up Mount Sinai, had been interpreted by theologians as symbolic of spiritual ascent of which the goal is divine revelation, and the three disciples were chosen by Christ, according to theologians, for their spiritual superiority among the apostles, to ascend the mountain



Fig. 5.6 The Transfiguration of Christ with Saint Apollinaris, mosaic, sixth century, Ravenna, Church of Sant'Apollinare in Classe, apse (*Photo credit* ©Maria Cristina Carile)

with Him.⁵⁵ If we understand the theophany witnessed by Moses and Elijah, Apollinaris, and the three lambs (as disciples or as eternal devotees in Paradise) as an indirect interpretation of Christ's Metamorphosis or a multivalent, conceptual representation of it, the scene, like the apse at St. Catherine's, is representative of the highest level of contemplation whereby the divinity of Christ is fully realised and directly communicated to a spiritually enlightened few who join Him. That this vision occurs not in the earthly—or historical—reality, but is in fact, an on-going, eternal vision in Paradise that may be available to those spiritual beings who rise to see it is made apparent by the presence of the orant Apollinaris, who is represented standing in a heavenly garden—a spiritual paradise—with arms raised, just beneath the envisioned jewelled cross in the apse. He is placed at the centre among the twelve ovine apostles (or perhaps representations of his own 'flock').⁵⁶

Below are portraits that are of importance to the programme as a whole, though rarely discussed as part of the larger programme. Indeed,

they are usually treated secondarily, explained as ceremonial, as part of commemorative liturgies, related to the reading of the diptychs, donor activities and so on, none of which is accurate.⁵⁷ We see in the window zone four separate, full-length portraits of bishops, each within his own shell niche, standing between pilasters with hanging curtains drawn back to reveal them (Fig. 5.7a–d). Votive crowns are above their heads and each holds a codex, perhaps making a visual comparison to the four Evangelists. Closer examination reveals they are not all of the same status. The two in the centre are saints, Sanctus Ursus and Sanctus Severus, as their inscriptions inform us, and their pilasters are jewelled. The two on the outer edges are Bishops Ecclesius and Ursicinus, recently deceased bishops of Ravenna at the time of the apse's decoration. They are not identified as saints, and their pilasters do not have jewels. It should be mentioned, in order to establish that their appearances there are not as donors, that Ursicinus saw the beginning of the construction of the Church of Sant' Apollinare in Classe, but did not live but two years in office.⁵⁸ Ecclesius is famous for his founding of San Vitale, where he also appears in the apse standing next to Christ with his donation in hand. Bishop Maximianus, whose portrait also appears in San Vitale, in



Fig. 5.7a–d Bishops, sixth century: Ursicinus, Saint Severus, Saint Ursus, Ecclesius, mosaic, sixth century, Ravenna, Church of Sant'Apollinare in Classe, apse, detail (*Photo credit* ©Maria Cristina Carile)

Justinian's mosaic panel on the wall adjacent to the apse, was the bishop who consecrated Sant'Apollinare in Classe, though he is not one of the bishops pictured. Neither Ecclesius nor Ursicinus invented the relics of Apollinaris, though Ursicinus moved the relics to their place under the altar when he began the church's construction.⁵⁹ Funerary commemoration cannot explain any of the four bishops' portraits, since not one was buried in the church.⁶⁰

What we see, then, is not an array of donor portraits, commemorative or cult portraits. They are, instead, part of a hierarchic display of images of local bishops with the exalted, sainted bishop, Apollinaris, at the peak, followed by two lesser, sainted bishops, which further proclaims the status of Ravenna among the greatest bishoprics in terms of spiritual and ecclesiastical legacies. At the edges are portraits of those non-sainted bishops within living memory of the community.

Let us imagine, for a moment, what it would have been like to be a contemporary viewing the apse programme. Given the dominant conception of hierarchy eloquently expressed by Pseudo-Dionysius, I argue that viewers would have understood the arrangement as presenting a spectrum of holiness, with images of local bishops demonstrating various degrees of spiritual attainment, organised to radiate from the central axis of the mosaic and altar to the outer edges of the apse. Moreover, there was another layer to the hierarchy: the living bishop presiding, with arms extended, before the altar upon which rested the Gospel book, echoing in life the saint pictured above and the portraits below, a living link in the chain. In Pseudo-Dionysian terms, the apse imagery reflects both unity and differentiation, becoming more diverse the farther away from the peak, including in this multiplicity the recognisable portraits of the non-sainted bishops of recent memory, whose features are more varied than those of the other bishops, and the living and presiding clergy at the altar. It demonstrates a radiating of God's holiness through the Incarnation, Christ's disciples, and their direct descendants, namely, the bishops of the church and the ecclesiastical hierarchy over which they preside and have been tasked with aiding Christians further down the spiritual hierarchy. The programme further unites Ravenna and its bishops, past and present, with the greater Church hierarchy. Perhaps most importantly, the visual presentation functions to accompany the viewer in his or her attempt to perceive heaven and to overcome the boundary separating one from it. It is not a single leap, but an upward progression, divinely designed to aid mankind.

Another way to visualise the ascent, which has already been described, is with a ladder. Connected to Jacob's dream, it was interpolated as the heavenly ascent of the blessed, as can be seen in an example from the Catacomb of Domitilla, in a fourth-century painting showing martyrs on either side of the arch ascending on ladders to heaven, represented by a bust of Christ at the centre and apex of the arch.⁶¹ It was also the basis for St. John Climacus' *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, a treatise on monasticism written in the sixth century at Mount Sinai where he was a monk, which describes the monastic pursuit of spiritual perfection as rungs on a ladder, reaching from earth to heaven.⁶²

However, it is the notion chains that can perhaps be inferred within the programmatic imagery of hierarchy that I wish to describe now. When Pseudo-Dionysius called upon the image of a chain suspended from heaven, he urged readers in his *On the Divine Names* to, 'Imagine a great shining chain hanging down from the heights of heaven to the world below'. Yet, lest we imagine the purpose of the metaphor solely to explain divine emanation, Dionysius goes on to explain, 'We grab hold of it with one hand and then another, and we seem to be pulling it down towards us. Actually it is already there on the heights and down below and instead of pulling it to us we are being lifted upward to that brilliance above, to the dazzling light of those beams'.⁶³ In this metaphor of a 'chain of being', Pseudo-Dionysius is not original. Perhaps not directly influential to Pseudo-Dionysius, the Neoplatonist Macrobius illustrates a similar concept when, writing in the early fifth century, he states that everything in existence follows 'on a continuous succession, degenerating step by step in their downward course, the close observer will find that from the Supreme God even to the bottom-most dregs of the universe there is but one tie, binding at every link and never broken. This is the golden chain of Homer, which, he tells us, God ordered to hang down from the sky to the earth'.⁶⁴ Indeed, Macrobius even urges us to imagine this chain as reflections of a single countenance in a *series of mirrors* arranged in a row reflecting a single countenance, making it clear that the Golden Chain was not just the arrangement of the cosmos, but was the human representation of the divine reflected in those divinised humans who imparted such wisdom. In other words, the Golden Chain was comprised of the philosophers themselves who followed the path in succession, down through the ages, as Marinus makes clear when he comments upon Hegias, who, 'Showed clear signs from childhood of possessing all the virtues of his ancestors and of belonging to the Golden

Chain of philosophers that started with Solon'.⁶⁵ Such an assessment is useful to recognise a pervasive understanding of how revelation to followers and practitioners can be perceived as occurring through other humans. These notions are, I believe, influential to Christian visualisations of the complex dynamics of what was in Neoplatonism emanations or irradiations of the One, and which became degrees of divine illumination in spiritual exemplars and holy mediators. The chain was also developed in the metaphysics of Proclus, whose writings, unlike Macrobius', were very influential to Pseudo-Dionysius. At the risk of over-simplifying, Proclus describes the strata of the chains of being for all things in terms of proximity to the prototype of the species, or in the chain that descends from the One to all matter, and states that there is degeneration and multiplication the further away from the source. So too, does he evoke the Great Chain to explain how philosophy has been imparted through human links in the chain.⁶⁶

In comparable Christian imagery there are indeed such hierarchic 'chains' filled with the reflected countenances of God to be found in the oft-used motif of rows of medallion portraits of saints.⁶⁷ A fairly popular motif, Christian examples in church programmes from the fifth and sixth centuries, around the time of Pseudo-Dionysius' Christian Neoplatonism, often feature medallions of apostles and/or saints depicted in rows as if 'hanging' from the apex of an arch, where the highest ranking image—usually depicting Christ or a cross—is placed. Surviving examples can be seen on arches of the mid-sixth-century Basilica Euphrasiana in Poreč (with female saints descending from the central medallion of Christ as the Lamb), the sixth-century mosaic from the Church of the Panagia Kanakariá at Lythrankomi in Cyprus (with apostles still evident from the right side), the small, cruciform Oratory of Sant'Andrea in the episcopal palace in Ravenna, dated to around 500 (Christ at the centre of six apostles on the apsidal arch, Christ and six more on the arch over the barrel vaulted entrance, and including female and male saints on the arches of the side vaults), San Vitale in Ravenna (Christ as God at the apex and the twelve plus two saints on the arch leading to the sanctuary), and St. Catherine's at Sinai (with apostles and the two living monks, as mentioned already).⁶⁸ This is not to say that medallion portraits were made directly according to the metaphor of the Golden Chain of Heaven despite its immense importance to philosophers, especially the Neoplatonists, and which, as indicated above, can be found in Pseudo-Dionysius.⁶⁹ Having a long history in Greco-Roman

portraiture, medallion portraits did not originate in Christian context. The significance of *imagine clipeatae*, or shield portraits, need not be fully explained here; the range of uses, whether in imperial, commemorative, or funerary, in public or in private contexts, is too expansive to survey.⁷⁰ It need only be argued for the purposes of this article that there are no arrangements of Roman medallion portraits that can be called upon as comparison to the Christian examples cited above. In pagan, late antique contexts, most medallion portraits of venerable persons, such as philosophers, follow different schemas. For example, the relief tondo portraits of philosophers from fourth- or fifth-century Aphrodisias appear to have been placed in pairs around the apse of a building that may have served, interestingly enough, as a Neoplatonic school.⁷¹ They included portrait medallions of the ancient, 'sainted' philosophers, but also more recent and even perhaps contemporary portraits of now unidentifiable philosophers. It was a programme that may be related to the Sinai medallions in that also at Sinai were added to the esteemed company of the apostles the round portraits of the two contemporary spiritual exemplars. Similarly, the Aphrodisias tondi are conceptually evocative because of their honoured place in the apse. In this way, they are perhaps contextually linked to a perception of divinely reflective countenances, yet they do not seem to have been arranged along the vertical and were likely distributed there according to some other meaningful placement.

While certainly there is inherent hierarchy within the visual systems of *imagine clipeatae* when they are included as additional elements of larger portraits on late antique diptychs and on Christian portraits and icons from this period, there does not seem to be the same emphasis on a full spectrum of hierarchy. The clipeate portraits, whether imperial figures or Christian holy figures, are understood as images pointing to the greater authority from which the power of the portrayed civic figure or saint derives.⁷² Ivory diptychs, whether for official or religious purposes, present the clipeate portraits, typically two, to either side of the central figure, perhaps with some regard to left and right. A comparable example of medallion portraits that present an array of descending figures of imperial figures instead of sainted personages may have been seen in Galla Placidia's church, San Giovanni Evangelista, in Ravenna, where perhaps on or over the apsidal arch were displayed the medallion portraits of the imperial family members. Yet their precise placement in the apse is not known for sure and may not have followed the curve

of the arch, as some have hypothesised.⁷³ Meanwhile, over the arch of Santa Sabina in Rome were now-lost medallion portraits of some fourteen unidentified male figures descending from a central image of Christ; they have been variously suggested as saints or apostles, but also perhaps including popes.⁷⁴

Thus, though not literally chains, these Christian medallions portraying iconic figures of holy and elevated status nonetheless evoke the idea of an array of reflective countenances, the Golden Chain in the Neoplatonic sense. Moreover, they are arranged in vertical lines following the curve of the arch as if suspended from heaven with the supreme image of Christ or a cross at the top and continuing down through a hierarchy of portraits of holy figures.⁷⁵ We see, for example, the medallions in the apse of Saint Catherine's successively descending from the central roundel containing the cross at the top ending the spectrum of portraits with the countenances of the two living monks at either corner. We see also a chain of countenances in the medallion portraits on the sanctuary's main arch at San Vitale in Ravenna (Fig. 5.8). Here, the apex holds an image of a bearded Christ as God, and continues downward in successive order from there with his apostles, the foremost among them—Peter and Paul—flanking Christ at the top. To show the succession of the sacred hierarchy after the apostles, the later saints, Protasius and Gervasius, are added at the bottom on either side.

CONCLUSIONS

Visual programmes and portable images that include portraits of saints, monks and abbots, bishops, non-sainted holy men, and so on, who can be understood as having attained differing levels of holiness and spiritual achievement, undermine interpretations of a single, elevated plane of saintly existence in visual art. Christian art of this period relied upon the concept of hierarchy, already conceptually circulating before Pseudo-Dionysius clearly articulated it, that defined each person in relationship to one another and that was used as a model in which to address the spiritual path to comprehending God. In this system, portraits of holy persons, no less than the highest of saints, were not to be put aside as one progressed closer to God, for they directly related to the upper reaches of human existence, served to mediate the various levels of mediation, and offered familiar local figures as intercessors.



Fig. 5.8 Medallions of Christ, the twelve apostles, and Saints Protasius and Gervasius, mosaic, c.545, Ravenna, Church of San Vitale, sanctuary arch (*Photo credit* Katherine Marsengill)

Considering the importance local holy persons for late antique Christians, we might now assert that these portraits manifested the belief that representations of such persons were essential to the immediate community's perception of hierarchy. They, along with the even holier local martyr or sainted bishop, provided tangible links in the metaphorical chain in ways distant saints, even though acknowledged as more powerful, did not. As is also apparent, they manifested links in a spiritual chain that could reach to higher, more distant saints. By representing these local mediators in heaven like the saints, or approaching heaven more closely, those portrayed could present their communities to that higher court.

What this chapter has attempted to show, therefore, is that the late antique Christian notions of a vertical arrangement of spiritual beings and vertical ascent, which was a prevalent conception of the order of natural and supernatural beings, and which was further articulated as

hierarchy by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, provide us with a more accurate understanding of late antique Christian art. This interpretation of the visual evidence is highly conceptual and to a degree conjectural; it cannot be proved to what extent the philosophical and religious concept of hierarchy as outlined by Pseudo-Dionysius had direct or indirect influence in the creation of these programmes. Nevertheless, it is clear that previous studies have not taken into account the importance of late antique hierarchy, in general, as a progression, but instead have placed the saints and chosen holy persons depicted as if high above in the heavenly court without differentiation, or categorised the inclusion of non-sainted individuals as privileged donors. This latter view is especially negligent of the potential that such members of Christian communities were locally commemorated and seen as potential mediators; they were familiar, religious leaders who were immediate and relevant to those that knew them, who belonged among a successive chain of local martyrs and leaders (or even among the apostles themselves), and who were more directly invested in the elevation of their communities into the larger Christian hierarchy. Nor have these views included in their interpretation of artistic programmes the late antique viewer, who readily admitted differing and various degrees within the spiritual hierarchy mediating access to supernatural powers. I suggest rather to consider 'ways of seeing' on the part of viewers that are more in line with contemporary thoughts about supernatural hierarchy and spiritual ascent, inherited from pagan philosophical antecedents.

Thus, the argument here is that images of Christ in heaven along with his 'courtiers' do not reflect a conceptual framework or hierarchic model where the inhabitants presented are beyond ordinary reach or understanding. The heavenly court was indeed perceived as supremely elevated, and certainly, in Pseudo-Dionysian terms, at the very zenith God's realm is ineffable and indescribable. This reality, however, was already visually mediated in the very the creation of images of Christ as the visible God, the angels, and the saints. But this also included images of beings lower in the hierarchy, of non-sainted holy men. For neither Pseudo-Dionysius nor Christian art of the period, especially programmes that include portraits of local holy men, leave mankind without access to spiritual assistance and assistants, which are made abundant through the hierarchies.

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NOTES

1. Generally, see Brown (1982) and Frankfurter (2003).
2. See Jones (2014) and MacMullen (1997, 91–102) here including a discussion of how Christianity eventually subsumed many of these beliefs. For the continuation of the ancestor cult among the Christians and in Christian contexts, see esp. MacMullen (2010, *passim*) with bibliography, and esp. 604–5, for intercessory spaces of saintly and mortal tombs; Rebillard (2009, 140–75; 2003); also Potthoff (2017, 2–3, 70–87, 121–36) whose study of late antique Christian ancestor worship in Carthage recognises that the Christian family extended beyond blood relations. Cf. Augustine, *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae* I, 34.75, PL 32:1342; CSEL 90:81, about Christians feasting at the tombs of loved ones and adorning images there. The seminal article on Christian tombs and pagan-like celebrations in cemeteries is Krautheimer (1960). See also Brown (1981, *passim*) for a general discussion of how late antique bishops directed traditional beliefs regarding the cult of the dead and the ‘stable grammar of the impingement of the supernatural in society’, (108), toward the Christian holy saints. On how the development of a cult of saints depended upon the Roman ancestral cult, see MacMullen (2010, 610).
3. For discussion, see Siniosoglou (2010).
4. For discussion of pagan influences on late antique Judaism, see Jones (2014, 34–3). See further *ibid.*, 43–4, for examples of early Christian heretical sects that incorporated pagan beliefs about lesser deities.
5. See Brown (2012, 201–3).
6. See esp. Gwynn (2011). For an historiographical overview of the pagan versus Christian dichotomy, see Boin (2014) and Jones (2014, 1–8). For the inherent though misleading dichotomies and their binary constructs in the primary texts of the fourth and fifth centuries, see Rebillard (2012, 1–8), Kahlos (2017), and MacMullen (1997, esp. 1–31). For evidence of Christian participation in pagan ritual, see Rebillard (2012), Belayche (2004), and Bolognesi Recchi Franceschini (1995).
7. Julian, *Letter* 19; Wright (ed. and trans.) (1923, 49:289A–93A); see also Lane and MacMullen (1992, 267–8).
8. On ancestor worship and mediation, see above note 2. On the divinisation of philosophers and their veneration, see below note 26.

9. Weber (1978, 419); a quote further expounded upon by Siniosoglou (2010, 132) who also briefly mentions that such a view also lay at the heart of the Christian cult of saints and its justification. Weber uses this understanding of the sociology of religion to discuss notions of magic in Christianity (Chapter 6).
10. E.g. Porphyry's *Peri Agalmaton* (Smith [ed.] 1993, 407–34; Gifford [trans.] 1903) is an explication of the various gods as visible aspects of God, with Zeus at the top; also, Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 2.1–10; Clarke et al. (ed. and trans.) (2003, 83–118) describing various lesser supernatural beings. See also, Proclus, *De Theologia Platonis* III.3; Taylor (trans.) (1816, vol. I, 165) on the belief that there is unity in everything arising from the One and extending to all 'the genera of beings, and their progressions'. For the conception of hierarchy in Plotinus, see O'Meara (1975, esp. 79–123). See Siniosoglou (2010, 130) about how these intermediaries were perceived in philosophic monotheism and inclusive henotheism.
11. A general and seminal study on the history of this thinking is Lovejoy (1960). For the influence of pagan philosophy, especially Neoplatonism, on late antique Christianity, see Gros (2002, esp. chapters 4 and 5) and Louth (2007, *passim*).
12. Brown (1983) and Rapp (1999, 2005).
13. *Symposium* 203a; Joyce (trans.) (1961, 555).
14. Vikan (2010) orig. 1982, remains the most important resource for pilgrimage art during this period. On more specific subjects, *loca sancta*, etc., see the collection of articles in Ousterhout (ed.) (1990). A recent interpretation of the magical or ritual activation of pilgrims' tokens in Late Antiquity is found in Pentcheva (2010, esp. 17–44) which meshes nicely with an understanding of the faithful as participants in cult as a means to access the supernatural.
15. Brown (1981, 50–68) describes the intimate relationships established by Latin bishops like Paulinus of Nola and the martyrs to whom they were devoted, as well as the perception of a hierarchy of intermediaries that influenced this phenomenon.
16. Rapp (2005, 29–30) and Brent (1999, 2–4, 148).
17. *Homilia encomiastica in Meletium*; PG 50:515–516; Mayer and Neil (trans.) (2006, 39–48).
18. On the idea that there were numerous cults that sprang up around now-unknown personages, see Marsengill (2013, 37–9, 45–7).
19. This is because many Neoplatonists eschewed the material body as unworthy of representation. Cf. Plotinus' condemnation of the practice of making portraits in Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 1; Brisson et al. (ed.) (1992, vol. II, 132–3).

20. *Oratio funebris in Meletium episcopum*; PG 46:862B.
21. E.g. Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 5:14ff and 8:4; Clarke et al. (ed. and trans.) (2003, 249ff., 349); Pseudo-Dionysius, *CH* III.2:165B; II, 18; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 154): 'The goal of a hierarchy, then, is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at one with him'; see also Louth (1989, 105). But as Louth points out, except for the ascent from catechumen to believer, for Pseudo-Dionysius, ordinary Christians do not engage further in the ascent. Spiritual ascent or the process of spiritual perfection through the hierarchies is reserved for monks and clergy.
22. Recently Purpura (2017, esp. 19–53). See also Perl (2007, 65–81).
23. Rapp (1999). On charisma, see Rousseau (1971, 387). For discussion of the tension created within the church to recognise charismatic holy men in later centuries, see van Rossum (1981).
24. For example, see *DN* IV.1:693B; I, 145; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 72). For analogous or proportionate revelation, see also, for example, Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* I.1:588A; I, 109; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 49); *DN* I.2:588D; I, 110; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 50). See also Pavlos (2017b) on aptitude and participation in Pseudo-Dionysius, and esp. 9 for finer distinctions in the notion of participation, between what is portioned out from God to be shared and what designates the receiver/participant of proportionate revelation.
25. For a discussion the notion in Neoplatonism, esp. the term ἐπιτηδεύτης, or 'aptitude', but overlapping other words like δύναμις (though Neoplatonists had reshaped the meaning from Aristotle's explication of 'capacity'), and the related δεκτικότητα, translated as 'receptivity', among others, see Pavlos (2017a).
26. Numerous portraits of philosophers survive to the present day, as do numerous primary texts explaining how philosophers were viewed as 'divinised', or holy persons. Generally, see Fowden (1982) and Zanker (1995). For primary texts concerning actual veneration of their portraits: Seneca, *Epistle* 64.9–10 ('Why should I not possess the images of great men ... I worship them and model myself after these great names' [trans., Zanker, 205]); though now considered a later, dubious source, *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Marcus Antoninus* 3.5 (LCL 139.I:138–9), reports (not inconsonantly) that Emperor Marcus Aurelius kept portraits (golden statues) of his own philosophy teachers in his *lararium*; similarly, idem, *Augustus Severus* 29.2 (LCL 140.II:234–5) describes the various portraits found in the emperor's *lararium*, which, if to be believed, also included an image of Christ. Libanius, in a letter to Theodorus (Foerster [trans.] 1922, *Ep.* 1534; Norman [trans.] 1992, *Letter* 143, 295), speaks of owning three portraits of the second-century Sophist, Aristeides, at which he

gazes, though he does not speak directly to veneration. Augustine, *De haeresibus* 7 (PL 42:27; Rotelle [trans.] 1995, 35), describes the erroneous practice of the heretical Carpocratians, who venerated images of pagan philosophers alongside that of Christ, as does the much earlier text, Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus haereses* I, 25.6 (PG 7:685–686; SC 264:342,100; Unger [trans.] 1992, 89–90). As a further example, the second-century philosopher, Peregrinus Proteus, was considered ‘divinised’ and worshipped after his death, according to the satirical account of Lucian. He is especially relevant because he gained Christian followers, who, according to Lucian, considered him to be a god, ‘second to that great one whom they still worship, the man who was crucified in Palestine...’; Lucian, *De Morte Peregrini* 11; MacMullen and Lane [trans.] (1992, 166). It is worth noting that Peregrinus is mentioned by Christian writers who clarify whether or not he is to be respected; see further Benko (1984, 30–53).

27. Athanasius, *Orationes contra Arianos* III. 39 (PG 26:407–408), provides us with the most succinct theology of the divinised Christian, though he was far from alone in his assessment. Generally on the tradition of the divinisation of man in Christian thought, see Gros (2002, *passim*).
28. E.g., the case of Peregrinus Proteus, above note 26, though obviously this would not be considered entirely Christian. For discussion of the various mechanisms at work in Late Antiquity that gave rise to the practice, as well as case examples, see Marsengill (2013, 31–47, 66–78, 107–82).
29. Examples of passages from these writers include: speaking of a ladder as a means of spiritual ascent, Origen, *Homilia 27 in Numeros* 33, 1–13, PG 12:780–801; Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* II.vii, 9–11, PL 34:39–40; Green (ed.) (1996, 64) (Augustine uses the word ‘*gradus*’, to describe the steps of ascent, as if a kind of staircase); about the spiritual significance of the mountain as metaphor for divine revelation, several passages in Gregory of Nyssa, *De Vita Moysis*: I.46, II.43, II.152, II.158, II.315; Malherbe and Ferguson (trans.) (1978, 43, 64, 91, 135); for Jacob’s ladder as the successive path of ascent, see Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration* 43.71, PG 36:591–594; Maximus, *Capita theologica et oeconomica* 2.15–8, PG 90:1131–1134; Palmer et al. (trans.) (1981, 140–1) comparing the ascent by apostles to witness the Transfiguration to the spiritual ascent to God; *DN* III.1:680C; I, 138; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 68). John Climacus is of course famous for his elaborate treatise, the *Scala Paradisi*, wherein the entire text is devoted to describing spiritual ascent in terms of the rungs of a ladder. For discussion about Christian spiritual ascent in the writings of some of these authors, see Cooper (2001) and Golitzin (1994).

30. Golitzin (2007, 118) and Louth (1989, 105–6) suggests something similar, writing, ‘His [Pseudo-Dionysius] hierarchies are static: they are not ladders up which one climbs, so that finally by reaching the rank of seraphim (or bishop, or monk) one attains union with God. The hierarchies seem to mediate union with God and deification by their *existence*, not by their finally being folded up as once reaches the top. The hierarchies are a glittering display of the divine glory, a magnificent *theophany*, and by repsonding to that theophany we are assimilated to God and deified.’
31. Maximus the Confessor, *Capita theologica et oeconomica* 2.26, PG 90:1135–1136; Palmer et al. (trans.) (1981, 143).
32. Patlagean (1983).
33. *Poem* 19.16–54, CSEL 30:119–20.
34. *DN* IV.1:393C; I, 144; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 72).
35. For the perceived transformative power of spiritual enlightenment on the physical appearances of holy persons, see below note 67.
36. E.g. *DN* I.4:589D–593A; I, 113–16; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 51–3).
37. Cf. *EH* I.ii:372D–373A; II, 65–6; Lui bheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 196).
38. Siniosoglou (2010); he is borrowing Max Weber’s term, ‘Alltagreligion’.
39. Admittedly, analysis has remained mostly iconographic and comparisons of the shared imagery of the heavenly and earthly courts. For imperial art as the major influence on the iconographical development of Christian art after its imperial endorsement in the fourth century, see Grabar (1968, 5–54). Beyond being a source of iconography, however, is the consistent assertion that Byzantine art places Christ as the emperor, enthroned in a heavenly court, reflecting a great divide in Byzantine society; see, for example, Cormack (1985, 17). This has a history of thought behind it related to the notion of ‘caesaropapism’. About its exaggerated and derisive application to Byzantine society as the epitome of caesaropapism, see Dagron (2003, 282–312). A helpful reevaluation of the perception of government and emperor in the Byzantine period is Kaldellis (2015, 53–61); he, too, makes the distinction between modern-era rulers who are absolute and elide their identities with the State (i.e. Louis XIV), and the late Roman and Byzantine emperors, who saw themselves as ruling to benefit the people.
40. Notable for its criticism of art historians’ interpretation of late antique Christian art as deriving and reflecting an imperialist model is Mathews (1993, 3–21). See also Jefferson and Jensen (eds.) (2015) for challenging Mathews but providing more nuance to the issue.
41. Siniosoglou (2010, 140).

42. On the rise of Christian euergetism, including church building, see generally Cameron (1993, 126–7). For analyses of bishops' portraits in church programmes, see Lipsmeyer (1981), Klinkenberg (2009), and Caillet (2011). For a reassessment of their role as more than donors but as representatives of their communities in late antique church programmes, see Liverani (2016).
43. Marsengill (2013, 116).
44. *CH* III.2:165A; II, 17–18; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 154). Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *CH* XII.2–3:292C–293B; II, 42–3; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 175–6) on how church hierarchs are superior to their subordinates and on why some distinguished men who have devoted themselves to God, presumably outside the church hierarchy, are deserving of the epithet 'divine'.
45. Marsengill (2013, esp. 6, 59).
46. *Ibid.*, 187–95. While most scholars have not addressed the function of such a portrait outside of the attested creation of bishops' portraits (Apa Abraham was also Bishop of Hermonthis), Brenk (2010, 94–5) suggests that the reason for its creation, like many other examples of panels and monastic wall paintings from Egypt, is most likely due to the eagerness of his community to propel the abbot to sainthood.
47. See Clédat (1999, 158, 164, fig. 142); for a discussion of these figures and examples, see Marsengill (2013, 179, 249–51).
48. For discussion of the apse mosaic and bibliography, see Marsengill (2013, 158–65).
49. Cf. for example, Origen, *Homilia in Genesim* 1.7; PG 12:151C–152B.
50. Elsner (1994) describes the mosaic programme at Saint Catherine's as a visualisation of Pseudo-Dionysius' mystical ascent and explains the theological and mystical importance of the Metamorphosis, in particular.
51. *MTh* I.3:1000C–1001A; II, 143–4; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 136–7).
52. Elsner (1994, 86–8).
53. The subject of the apse has traditionally been identified as Christ's Transfiguration due to the presence of Moses and Elijah, despite the unusual depiction of the jeweled cross at the centre instead of Christ as he is described in the biblical event. Grabar (1946, 195) interprets it as the Transfiguration with eschatological significance, which has been variously expounded upon in many studies since (e.g. more recently, the monograph by Michael [2005, 63–74] and in Jäggi [2013, 272–3]). Von Simson (1987, 43) interprets it as the Transfiguration that is also an exaltation of the Cross. Deichmann explains the multivalent symbolism of the cross used in the Transfiguration in light of theological texts that saw the event of the Transfiguration as prescient of the Crucifixion and eternal

- salvation through the sacrifice of Christ. A new interpretation is offered by Bergmeier (2014, 189–94), who sees it as an abstraction of a more generalised theophany with no overt connection to the Metamorphosis.
54. Bergmeier (2014, 191–2).
 55. See above, notes 49 and 50.
 56. Walter (1982, 12) interprets Apollinaris as a contemplative visionary. Mauskopf Deliyannis (2010, 268), asserts the pastoral role of the bishop-saint.
 57. Walter (1974, 82) admits he does not fully understand the inclusion of these portraits other than as ‘ceremonial’. However in his 1982 article, he attempts an interpretation based on each bishops’ historical significance, though some of his information is incorrect. Mauskopf Deliyannis (2010, 270–1) recognises the importance of the bishops in historical context, in the growing cult of Severus and the potential influence of Ecclesius as a recently deceased bishop. She gives larger credit to the notion of linking the bishopric of the apse programme’s director, Maximianus, to the greater history of the see.
 58. For the inscription in the narthex naming Ursicinus as founder, see Agnellus of Ravenna *Liber Pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis* 77; Mauskopf Deliyannis (trans.) (2004, 191–2). See also Deichmann vol. II, pt. 2, 3.
 59. The translation of the relics is evidently the reason that Ursicinus began construction on the new church. The original tomb was marked with an inscription, as well; see Deichmann vol. II, pt. 2, 4–5.
 60. Saint Ursus was buried in the cathedral of Ravenna before the high altar, Severus at the Monastery of St. Ruphilus, and Ecclesius and Ursicinus both in the southeast chapel of San Vitale. For Ursus, see Agnellus of Ravenna *Liber Pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis* 23; Mauskopf Deliyannis (trans.) (2004, 120). For Ecclesius and Ursicinus at San Vitale, see *ibid.*, 59; Mauskopf Deliyannis (trans.) (2004, 172). For Severus’ burial, see Picard (1988, 132); Agnellus of Ravenna *Liber Pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis* 16; Mauskopf Deliyannis (trans.) (2004, 112) makes indirect reference to his burial in a church in the former city of Classe.
 61. Saint-Roch (1999, 37–41, 100–4; figs. 9–10, 39–44).
 62. Martin (1954); though we have no early representations of his ladder, it can be found in manuscript illumination beginning in the tenth century and elsewhere later.
 63. *DN* III.1:680C; I, 138; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 68).
 64. *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* I. 14, 15; Stahl (trans.) (1990, 145). Homer’s Golden Chain can be found in the *Iliad* VIII.18.
 65. *Vita Procli* 26; as described by Uzdavinys in his introduction. Solon was believed to have been the first true philosopher, the first in the chain of successors. Cf the later interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius by St. Symeon

the New Theologian and evoking same idea regarding the importance of a chain of spiritual fathers through time and within the hierarchy of revelation. Symeon the New Theologian, *Capita Theologica* 3.4, SC 51:81; McGucken (trans.) (1982, 73): 'These saints themselves come after the ones who preceded them ... they become just like the golden chain with each one of them a link...one single chain in the one God'.

66. I will refer here generally to the work of Siorvanes (1996, 48–100, 185) instead of trying to interpret complex passages from Proclus' metaphysics for myself.
67. On the notion of the faces of holy persons being radiant images or reflections of God in hagiography, see Frank (2000, 24, 55, 116, 138, 160); for the application of these notions as evident in hagiographic descriptions to the creation and perception of icons as transcended countenances, see Marsengill (2013, 16–8, 53–4, 103–4, 271–7).
68. These monuments have extended bibliography. Generally, for the Basilica Euphrasiana in Poreč, see Terry and Maguire (2007); for the Panagia Kanakariá at Lythrankomi, Megaw and Hawkins (1977); for Sant'Andrea, Mackie (2003, 104–15); for San Vitale, see Deichmann (1976, vol. 1, 226–56) for Saint Catherine, see above note 48.
69. The Golden Chain of Heaven has a lengthy history in philosophical, mystical, and theological tradition too vast to review here. In the *Iliad* (above note 64), Homer speaks about the chain that links earth and heaven, and by which humans may ascend to the realm of the Gods. Centuries later, for Proclus and other Athenian school philosophers of the period, to quote Uzdavins (2004, xxi): 'The Golden Chain, stretching from Heaven to Earth, was used to describe both the unbroken *vertical* [emphasis mine] connection with the first principles (noetic sources of the demiurgic descent, as well as the paradigms of the revealed wisdom), and the horizontal, or historical, succession of the qualified masters and interpreters - a succession which was not always based exclusively on direct physical relations. In fact, the Golden Chain is the same as the Hermaic Chain. This chain was both the chain of theophany, manifestation, or descent (*demiourgike seira*), and the ladder of ascent. This imagery of the Golden Chain was inseparable from the metaphysics of light and solar symbolism'. This last sentence in particular reveals how light was important in Christian Neoplatonism as divine revelation, another subject that cannot be discussed in depth here. It is worth noting, however, that Procopius describes the dome of Hagia Sophia as if seemingly suspended from the golden chain of heaven; see Procopius, *De aedificiis* I, I, 23ff.; Haury and Wirth (ed.) (2001, 5–6).
70. There is ample literature on this portrait tradition in pagan and Christian use. Generally, see Fejfer (2008, 233–5) and Vermeule (1965).

71. Smith (1990, 151, 153).
72. Belting (1994, 107–14).
73. For proposed reconstructions that place the imperial portrait tondi around the triumphal arch, Ihm (1960, 17–18), Amici (2000), and Rizzardi (2011, 59–61). For reconstructions that place the medallions on the intrados of the triumphal arch, see Longhi (1995–1996); for a review of the various theories, see recently Fiori and Tozzola (2014, 33–40). Deichmann, vol. II, pt. 1 (1974, 116–17), places them horizontally in a row above the arch.
74. See esp. Andaloro (2006, 301–4).
75. It is worth noting that on many Christian objects with portrait medallions, the clipeate portraits maintain hierarchy by placing Christ at the ‘centre’ and radiating the portraits in hierarchic order from Christ. Examples include the fourth-century ivory known as the Brescia Casket now in Museo di Santa Giulia at San Salvatore, Brescia Italy, with Christ at the centre front followed by apostles; a sixth-century silver vase from Constantinople, now in the Louvre, with Christ in a medallion flanked by Peter and Paul, followed by John the Forerunner and John the Evangelist, opposite of which is the Virgin flanked by archangels; a silver censor dated to c.610, now the British Museum, with Christ flanked by Peter and Paul on one side and the Virgin flanked by James and John on the other. All of these can be found in cat. Weitzmann (ed.) (1978, fig. 87, 598–99, cat. 552, 615–17, cat. 562, 625, cf. cat. 572, 633). See also above note 69 for the notion of verticality being essential to understanding the Great Chain.

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Pseudo-Dionysius and the Staging of Divine Order in Sixth-Century Architecture

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This chapter will analyse churches built during the reign of Emperor Justinian (527–65) in search of a certain symbolic dimension that was available to audience-members from across the social spectrum. In past decades, scholars focused on identifying the connotations that sixth-century liturgical mises-en-scène communicated to the educated part of their audience. In doing so, they often turned to Pseudo-Dionysius' identification of the anagogical effect of the sacraments, understood as the capacity of those sacraments to elevate the mind towards spiritual truths.¹ The author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, however, also mentions a more literal perception of the sacraments, which he associates with the *hoi polloí*, the many.² The identification of this category of believers and of the perceptual mode associated with it sheds new light on the worldview detailed in the *Corpus*, carrying important implications

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for our understanding of liturgical spaces and performances of the period. Indeed, in claiming that bishops consciously staged the sacraments as awe-inspiring experiences, Pseudo-Dionysius prompts us to search for material evidence for their revelatory potential. What will emerge from the following analysis, firstly of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, and secondly of other churches from around the Mediterranean, is the dissemination of the same worldview detailed in the *Corpus* through cultic architecture. As a consequence, the present study will not only demonstrate that the Church and the imperial court shared the views of Pseudo-Dionysius, but will also further our understanding of sixth-century liturgical performances.

PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS AND THE *HOI POLLOÍ*

In affording multiple symbolic readings simultaneously, ritual spaces are polysemous environments par excellence.³ This was particularly true in the age of Justinian. At that time, as noted by Henry Maguire, ‘some works of art exhibited a kaleidoscopic shifting and overlapping of meanings, and in particular a use of ambiguous symbols to reconcile religious and political ideas’.⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius’ writings testify to the intentional character of this semantic complexity. Because Pseudo-Dionysius conceived of the sacraments as complex mises-en-scène that could be used to convey complex concepts, he openly discussed their staged character.⁵ He suggested that, while part of the audience perceived the sacraments as symbols, the οἱ πολλοί (literally: ‘the many’) failed to go beyond the literal. Enchanted by the magnificence of liturgical performance, they remained focused on human mimicry of the divine. Echoing the description that Paulinus of Nola (c.354–431) made of Christians visiting the shrine of Saint Felix in Campania to justify his own staging of visual and spatial experience, Pseudo-Dionysius identifies the *hoi polloi* as those who ‘lacking in reason have a limitless appetite for the material, a thrust originating in that chronic urge to dwell with the ephemeral, that living, mastering longing to remain with whatever is applauded by the senses’.⁶ In another passage, Pseudo-Dionysius contrasts the *hoi polloi* with mystagogues such as himself, who explored the nature of the divine through contemplation. Mystagogues, we are told, ‘do not gaze after that glory so stupidly praised by the mob [...] they have no time to return to the images that the many mistakenly consider just’ (ἀλλὰ τῶν ὄντως ὄντων ἐρώσιν οὐδὲ πρὸς δόξαν ὁρῶσι τὴν ὑπὸ πλήθους ἀλόγως μακαριζομένην [...] πρὸς τὸ τοῖς πολλοῖς νομοίως δοκοῦν οὐκ

ἐπιστρέφεται).⁷ Here and elsewhere, recognition of the staged character of the sacraments comes in the context of the worldview detailed in the *Corpus*. The ontological system that Pseudo-Dionysius proposes renders natural differences in perception and makes the literal perceptual mode an essential step in the process of coming to know God.

Identified by Pseudo-Dionysius as the ‘hierarchs before their time’, the designers of the sacraments intended that human liturgy should be perceived as divine. In pursuing this intention, they responded to the human inability to know God if not through the senses. Thus, stirred by what we are told was a ‘godlike desire’ to save their brethren,⁸ these bishops made human what was divine:

[God] modelled it [the ecclesiastic hierarchy and the Eucharistic sacrament] on the hierarchies of heaven, and clothed these immaterial hierarchies in numerous material figures and forms so that, in a way appropriate to our nature, we might be uplifted from these most venerable images to interpretations and assimilations which are simple and inexpressible. For it is quite *impossible* that humans should, in any immaterial way, rise up to imitate and to contemplate the heavenly hierarchies without the aid of those material means capable of guiding us *as our nature requires*.⁹

Human beings thus could neither avoid nor ignore the sensual perceptual level. Nevertheless, one could learn to see the sacraments also on an exegetical level, as symbols of heavenly realities. The mystagogues excelled at this, and thereby detached themselves completely from the earthly, physical senses. The *hoi polloi*, however, seem to remain focused on the ‘dissimilar similarities’ that convinced them to believe.¹⁰ What was staged inside churches, therefore, was a performance of the worldview presented in the *Corpus* which, as it will become clear, Pseudo-Dionysius shared with the Imperial Court and bishops of his time.

Having adopted from Neoplatonic thought the system of being that postulated the existence of ontological levels emanating continuously from God, Pseudo-Dionysius and other members of the educated elite admitted to the existence of natural differences among believers.¹¹ The very notion of hierarchy that Pseudo-Dionysius details in the *Corpus* rendered differences in perfection (and perception) inevitable. This particular worldview had its origin in the concept of multiple heavens developed by a number of Mediterranean societies in Antiquity, an idea which received scientific support in the geocentric theory developed by the astronomer Claudius Ptolemaeus (d. c.160). The resulting

assimilation of cosmic and heavenly levels quickly gained popularity in Roman society and changed the way in which embodied life was perceived. Although placed at the bottom of the chain of being, embodied life remained a product and mirror image of divine activity. By integrating everything and everyone in a continuum that united them with the source of life, the new ontological scheme annulled the chasm that traditionally separated mortals from immortals. Consequently, embodied life was repositioned vis-à-vis the sacred, and perfection became a matter of imitation of the divine above and ascension towards the upper cosmic levels. The imitation of the divine that enabled one to draw closer to the divine model was codified into rituals by late antique cults which exploited the new worldview's potential to make 'human activity become the vehicle for a divine activity'.¹²

Christian bishops made the most of this system. Human beings were created in the divine image (Gen. 1.26–7) and encouraged to achieve perfection by emulating Jesus.¹³ This model of being in the world was embodied during the first centuries CE by martyrs whose perfect lives were consecrated through their Christ-like deaths.¹⁴ Beginning in the fourth century, debates on the nature of Christ impacted his pertinence as a model for daily life.¹⁵ Concurrently, as intellectuals converted and rose to the episcopate they merged Christian tenets with Neoplatonic notions and cosmological concepts and recast the underlying structure of Christianity as a pyramidal structure.¹⁶ Two centuries later, Pseudo-Dionysius and his contemporaries made this conceptual mélange into a coherent system. Detailed in the *Corpus* and, as I will argue, displayed in Justinianic churches, this worldview shaped Byzantine civilisation.¹⁷ Confirmed as natural by supposedly natural laws, the pyramidal structure legitimised imperial rule and intra-cult hierarchies. The latter coagulated slowly, structuring Christian communities according to a principle of spiritual purity. The 'othering of the clergy', as Peter Brown called the process, as well as the creation of various categories among lay believers, distanced most Christians from the model represented by Christ.¹⁸ Together, the adoption of hierarchy as a natural principle, the distancing of Christ from humanity through theological speculations, and the consecration of the clergy rendered individual perfection a relative rather than an absolute matter for most believers. Each Christian was a link in the chain of being that united the lowest levels of creation to God. Angels and humans thus contributed to the divinising dynamic that pervaded creation by transmitting the divine image downwards, towards those less perfect:

If one talks then of *hierarchy*, what is meant is a certain *perfect arrangement*, an image of the beauty of God which sacredly works out the mysteries of its own enlightenment in the orders and levels of understanding of the hierarchy, and which is likened toward its own source as much as is permitted. Indeed, *for every member of the hierarchy, perfection consists in this, that it is uplifted to imitate God as far as possible* and, more wonderful still, that *it becomes what scripture calls a 'fellow worker with God'* (cf. 1 Cor. 3.9) and a reflection of the workings of God.¹⁹

Perfection thus was reached by attaining the level of divine likeness for which one had been intended, and which corresponded to one's position within the hierarchical structure. This view ossified the more dynamic Christian community of earlier centuries, in which a search for the ideal state was the catalyst for human existence. What emerged in the sixth century and is present in the *Corpus* as well as in contemporary liturgical practice is a hierarchical structure that tended to make each individual, irrespective of his degree of likeness to the ideal model represented by Jesus, a 'fellow worker with God'. Benefitting most from the new worldview were the heads of the human hierarchy, the emperors and bishops, who emerged from the process as embodiments of the utmost degree of perfection attainable by human beings. Since it was through such figures that the rest of the human hierarchy encountered the divine image, their theophanic dimension was absolute:

The divine order of the hierarchs is therefore the first of those who behold God. It is the first *and also the last*, for in it the whole arrangement of the human hierarchy is fulfilled and completed. And just as we observe that every hierarchy ends with Jesus, so each hierarchy reaches its term in its own inspired hierarchy.²⁰

This model of community, in which only the heads of the clerical and political hierarchies were able to see and thereby reflect the divine image, was displayed during the Eucharistic liturgy.²¹ In this event, the bishop (and in parish churches the priest) stood in the place of Jesus in a ritualised reproduction of the Salvation drama.²² In the third quarter of the fourth century, we hear of Basil of Caesarea (330–79) combining the imitation of Christ with the concept of hierarchy that structured creation. During the liturgy, the bishop, clergy, and lay audience reproduced the dynamic of creation through the movement of their bodies. Gregory of Nazianzus (329–90) describes the scene in which Basil, the bishop,

sits on the episcopal throne, immobile as ‘a stone monument dedicated to God’, the clergy standing next to him and forming ranks reminiscent of angelic choirs, while the congregation in the nave of the church was likened to a sea.²³ In number, bishop, clergy, and laity comprised a pyramidal hierarchy with the bishop as apex, a model of organisation and authority which mirrored that of the imperial administration, and provided bishops with the court’s support in its promotion. Legitimised by imperial sanction and the belief that diversity in perceptual ability was natural and divinely ordained, sixth-century bishops constructed impressive stages on which to perform the heavenly hierarchy through the earthly one.²⁴ In turn, these settings (and the rituals they hosted) popularised a worldview that legitimised both State and Church.²⁵

JUSTINIAN’S HAGIA SOPHIA

Recent scholarship has principally focused on identifying the symbolic connotations of sixth-century liturgical spaces, including the various constructive, decorative, and ritual techniques employed to this effect.²⁶ Since modern knowledge of ancient concepts relies primarily on textual evidence produced by the educated elite, the semantic range thus identified teaches us little regarding the regular believer’s understanding of these spaces. By contrast, the information Pseudo-Dionysius supplies about the *hoi polloi* invites a reconsideration of these spaces, one that addresses the ways in which their artifices were used to present liturgical performances as theophanic rather than purely symbolic events. Jaś Elsner’s analysis of Saint Catherine’s in Sinai has identified the manner in which light, a theophanic expression open to appreciation by all categories of audience, was used to substantiate a vision that was simultaneously sensorial and symbolical. Following this interpretative path, I seek to identify those effects that were likely to be understood by all participants in liturgical rites, both active and passive. What will emerge is a concept of hierarchy popularised through the spaces, decoration, lighting, and ritual performance of the sixth-century liturgy.²⁷ Consequently, I advance the notion of hierarchy as the essence of the basic symbolic dimension of these spaces; as the concept that shaped the design and upon which other symbolic connotations were layered. This appears clearly in churches built during the reign of Justinian. Thanks to the emperor’s efforts to stimulate cohesion in Christian thought and practice, a significant level of coherence was achieved in the design of

churches.²⁸ The little that is known regarding the intellectual milieu at Justinian's court, either directly, through its members' writings, or indirectly, through the legislation and buildings that it produced, points to commonality with the views detailed by Pseudo-Dionysius in the *Corpus*.²⁹ Conjoined analysis of the churches Justinian himself commissioned, his regulation of church building in general, and opinions shared by intellectuals at his court reveals a desire to use church spaces and ritual performances as means of disseminating the hierarchical principle by which bishops, and through them the emperor, were promoted as living images of God.³⁰

Seeking to strengthen the Christian character of the Empire, Justinian used imperial legislation to stimulate dialogue between quarrelling theological schools and, at the same time, imposed rules regarding the building of churches.³¹ The notions underlying his building policy are, I believe, embedded primarily in the sixth-century Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, and secondarily in other imperial foundations of the time, as well as in private commissions that emulated imperial foundations. For this reason, my analysis will focus on the Great Church before investigating how the concept it embodied was popularised across the empire. As scholars have often pointed out, Justinian's Hagia Sophia represents a turning point in Christian architecture and liturgy. It not only influenced ensuing church design, but also altered the way in which the Eucharistic ritual was understood thenceforth as a revelation of divine realities.³² Nevertheless, despite its effect on liturgical practice, the Great Church was first and foremost an imperial and not an ecclesiastic foundation. Begun in the wake of the Nika revolt, which almost cost Justinian his throne and left much of the imperial capital in ruin, the church appeared as a statement of the emperor's divinely sanctioned rule. In past years, thanks to the efforts of Nicoletta Isar, Nadine Schibille, Bissera Pentcheva, and others, much of the complex symbolism underlying the design of the building has been elucidated.³³ We can now affirm with confidence that Hagia Sophia's architecture and decoration referenced notions ranging from archaic topoi, such as the circular dance of the planets, to the subtle philosophical musings on the limitations of human perception that we find in Pseudo-Dionysius and his contemporaries. It is, nevertheless, reasonable to suppose that only some of these connotations were clear to all those entering the church. Despite theological matters becoming a popular concern in Constantinople, it is unlikely that a regular believer would have gleaned from the

mise-en-scène of Justinian's Great Church the same range of abstract notions as a mystagogue such as Pseudo-Dionysius.

For Hagia Sophia, poetic descriptions contemporary to the dedication of the church cast light on the designers' intentions. Used to indicate the *correct* manner in which the space was to be apprehended, these *ekphrásēis* tell us more about the desired effect rather than the objective characteristics of the space.³⁴ Since they target an educated audience, the principle contribution that such descriptions can make to the present study lies in their confirmation that the church's architecture was not to be perceived in isolation, but rather in the context of dramatic rituals and through the mediation of decoration, iconography, and lighting. As a complete experience, liturgy in the Great Church addressed all the senses. A first hint as to the nature of the experience proposed by the space is given by the manner in which the general public's access was regulated. The separation of the church's interior and exterior through a double narthex with unaligned doors indicates a desire to stress the interior's distinct nature.³⁵ Inside, the unprecedented volume of the space and its impressive luminosity coming from a combination of natural and artificial light sources and light-reflective surfaces, invited an immediate association with heaven, which was imagined in the period as being itself characterised by spaciousness and luminosity.³⁶ The massive dome that dominated the space stressed Hagia Sophia's cosmic dimension.³⁷ Under the effect of the dome, the longitudinal development of the interior lost much of its force: the dome, in fact, emphasised the dimension of *being* rather than the dynamic process of *becoming* that characterised the basilical plan.³⁸ What remained as a dominant feature of the ground level was the essential separation between nave and sanctuary, achieved by means of the silver-plated templon. Once the immediate visceral response to the space weakened, the onlooker could focus on the details. An elite exercise in the early centuries CE, by Late Antiquity, the identification of decorative and constructive materials with their specific biographies and properties was a popular endeavour.³⁹ Those entering Hagia Sophia thus were likely to be able to identify the type, origin, and basic symbolic connotations of the materials used inside the church. The most common features of the materials used to decorate the interior of churches in the sixth century, and the most relevant for the symbolism of the spaces, were their capacity to represent certain natural elements (for example, grey marble standing for solidified water, or polychrome wall revetment evoking flowery meadows), and the viewer's perception of them as light-emitting rather than light-reflecting.⁴⁰

A narrow range of materials was used to decorate the Great Church, which points to a conceptual design, one important enough for Justinian to have forgone an opportunity to flaunt the empire's worldwide expanse through the use of stone from every province.⁴¹ A tripartite vertical division consisting of grey Proconnesian marble on the floor, variegated marble revetment on the walls, and gold glass mosaic covering the vaults and dome reiterated the formation of seas, flora (earth), and heaven in the creation.⁴² This epitome of creation was consecrated by the light in which it was bathed. Holding visible light to be an extension of the uncreated light emanating from the person of God, the late antique onlooker saw the interior of Hagia Sophia as a dynamic setting, a space that the divine light carved out into the realm of the senses in order to enable interaction with the divine.⁴³ Such a reading is confirmed by the sixth-century dedicatory hymn for the Great Church.⁴⁴ Unlike the *ekphrasis* of Paul the Silentary, the *kontakion* appears to be intended for a general audience rather than the court, and asserts (rather than alluding to) the meaning of the space.⁴⁵ According to its anonymous author, the building rivalled earth and heaven and provided a house suitable for God to live in. As pointed out by Nadine Schibille, the hymn insists on the light inside the church being a manifestation of the divine.⁴⁶ Created through a complex and calculated interaction between natural and artificial lighting sources and reflective decoration, the light inside the church was rendered almost tangible by the incense smoke.⁴⁷ The substantiating effect of the smoke drew parallels between the Great Church and the Temple in Jerusalem (a favourite analogy of the period), which had been inhabited by the Shekinah—the invisible yet space-filling Presence of God⁴⁸ (Fig. 6.1). This artifice used to flesh out the Divine Presence was protected by the complexity of the *mise-en-scène*. Indeed, authors of *ekphraseis* insist on the interior producing a sensation of vertigo, on the richness and variegated character of the decoration eliciting an overwhelming feeling.⁴⁹ Such reactions prevented a rational perception of the space as well as a rational analysis of the composing elements of its *mise-en-scène*. The artifices through which this effect was reached remained hidden within the coherence of the setting.⁵⁰

The setting's capacity to collapse heaven and earth had a particular effect on the perception of the liturgy and its performers. Enveloped in the Divine Presence, members of the clergy seemed to *embody* rather than mimic the heavenly liturgy.⁵¹ The author of the *kontakion* makes this point by claiming that the ritual was 'the impression [ἐκτύπωμα: lit. 'image in relief'] of the liturgy of those on high'.⁵² While imitation was



Fig. 6.1 Ray of light fleshed out by incense smoke at sunrise. Chapel of Saint Anne, Mount Sinai (*Photo credit* Fr. Justin. By permission of Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt)

the result of human choice and subject to imperfection, an impression was generated from above and produced an exact copy. This was the revelatory mode that Pseudo-Dionysius indicated as perfect. According to the author of the *Corpus*, as the divine image descends through the levels of being, it creates 'sacredly-imprinted images' (ιεροτύπων εικόνων).⁵³ The credibility of the Hagia Sophia as an image of heaven, which was gained through visual artifices embedded in its architecture, decoration, and lighting, sanctioned the operation of human hierarchy. This hierarchy was displayed inside the Hagia Sophia in its most complete and magnificent form, embodied by the imperial court and the archbishopric of the capital. The theophanic dimension of the space pointed to the human hierarchy as a bridge between human and divine—in keeping with the definition of hierarchy that we find in the *Corpus*.

That the design of the Great Church was primarily intended to promote the imperial and ecclesiastic hierarchies as embodiments of the divine order is sustained by several points. Most importantly, the manner in which the emperor related to the church space referenced the Constantinopolitan concept of imperial iconicity. Inherited from Hellenistic rulers, the idea that the emperor represented a living image of the divine was naturalised within Roman society to the point that even Christians accepted it as normal in the fourth century.⁵⁴ The dynamic between emperor and God discernible in the Hagia Sophia is analogous to the one Emperor Constantine (306–37) advanced in the fourth century through an image on the Chalke Gate. The monumental entrance to the imperial palace was decorated with a depiction of Constantine and his sons treading a snake, with the Chi-Rho above the emperor's head. The Christ-like stance and the reduction of God to his symbol pointed to the emperor as both the image and long arm of God. Similarly, Hagia Sophia's non-figural decoration left it to the human hierarchy performing the ritual to embody the divine; an order within which the emperor and archbishop stood for God. Artifices pertaining to the ritual ensured that this concept could be transmitted and connected the built space with the living performers. A combination of ritual gestures and calculated displays focused the setting's theophanic potential on certain elements. Throughout the ritual, certain elements of the *mise-en-scène* were brought to the front through their dramatic procession inside the church and display in chosen places. The Cross, Gospel book, vessels holding the Eucharistic bread and wine, the emperor, and the archbishop emerged as natural foci of the performance. Clothed in luminous materials—gold and jewels for the objects, purple robes for the emperor and archbishop—all were placed in visual contrast with their immediate contexts in order to create a sense of hierarchy. While the objects were paired with lights and set on the altar in the most luminous part of the church, purple-clad emperors and bishops were flanked by entourages dressed in white and spatially framed in a manner that evoked the setting of cultic images.⁵⁵ As a result, they appeared as both the apex of the visual experience and as the sources of the light pervading the space.⁵⁶

Confirmation of the iconic effect the liturgy in Hagia Sophia had on its performers comes from the liturgical innovations introduced in the decades following the church's dedication. The *Cherubikon* hymn that

was introduced during the reign of Justin II (565–74) had the members of the choir assert through chant their embodiment of angelic powers.⁵⁷ As pointed out by Cornelia Tsakiridou, the verb used by the melodist, εἰκονίζειν, went beyond the symbolic representation of angels, implying instead an incarnational dimension: ‘To iconize the Cherubim is to assume or embody their form, to give them a tangible presence, rather than to reflect or replicate them’.⁵⁸ Similarly, the prayer introduced by Patriarch Eutychius (*sed.* 552–65, 577–82), which preceded the eucharistic rite on Holy Thursday, promoted the identification of the faithful present in the church with the good thief crucified to the right of Jesus (Luke 23.39–43).⁵⁹ The capacity of the *mise-en-scène* to collapse the human and the divine during the liturgy thus not only legitimised the imperial and episcopal iconic performance of Christ, but catalysed the extension of the identificatory and revelatory dimension of the rites also to the rest of those present.⁶⁰ In keeping with the concept of hierarchy that the space and ritual promoted, the liturgy proposed that the lay audience and minor clergy identified themselves with historic and celestial models of secondary status. Therefore, within the historic dimension of the ritual, they were associated with the good thief and other biblical characters, while within the cosmic dimension of the performance, they were associated with angelic beings. These symbolic identities were complementary to the episcopal/imperial impersonation of Christ.

The creation of an all-encompassing illusion through decoration and its use to stimulate voluntary assimilation of the onlooker with the depicted characters was not a new technique. Discernible already in Pompeian houses, the technique was further developed in Late Antiquity.⁶¹ The interior of Hagia Sophia functioned in a similar manner. The heavenly atmosphere of the space invited the participants to embody the divine in a hierarchical order that was regulated through the division of the space and confirmed by liturgical roles. The Great Church enabled a seemingly perfect enactment of the concept of hierarchy as developed by Pseudo-Dionysius: as theophanic display, inclusive of its innovative notion of imperfect perfection. As attested by Pseudo-Dionysius, the intellectually inclined did not mistake the human for the heavenly hierarchy and saw the archbishop and the emperor as *images* of divine authority. The *hoi polloi*, on the other hand, saw the divine embodied by these individuals and made incarnate by the liturgical objects and the Eucharist⁶² (Fig. 6.2).



Fig. 6.2 Elder Pavlos serving the Liturgy on Holy Thursday, Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai (*Photo credit* Fr. Justin. By permission of Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt)

JUSTINIANIC CHURCHES OUTSIDE CONSTANTINOPLE

Hagia Sophia stood at the centre of Justinian's ambitious programme for a unified worship. Apart from himself commissioning or restoring a number of churches in places that were strategic to the empire and the faith (Constantinople, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Edessa, Sinai, Ephesus, and possibly Ravenna), Justinian wrote into law certain aspects essential to the performance of the sacraments.⁶³ These statutes included a condition that the inauguration of new churches required a proper lighting scheme, as well as a recommendation that priests should read prayers aloud 'so that the souls of those who listen may be moved to greater compunction'.⁶⁴ This confirms what the buildings themselves indicate: a focus on stimulating the capacity of the spaces to evoke heaven and on the ritual's identificatory effect.

Of the churches Justinian himself commissioned outside Constantinople, that from the monastery dedicated to the Virgin on Mount in Sinai is still extant.⁶⁵ There, the artifices are put to use for a slightly different purpose than in Hagia Sophia and other churches built for a regular lay audience, namely, to harness and Christianise the theophanic potential of the site. Built by local craftsmen but decorated by mosaicists likely sent from the capital, the church of the monastery condensed the revelatory character of the place where God had shown himself to Moses in the burning bush and the cloud, and collapsed it with the Transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor.⁶⁶ As often observed in academic studies, the vision depicted inside the church represented the apex of an experience that began with one's decision to leave home and embark on a pilgrimage to the site.⁶⁷ The journey and the oddity of the desert setting enhanced the pilgrims' expectation and the impact of their eventual encounter with God, whose presence was staged as light.⁶⁸ Oriented in order to be invested with sunlight during the morning hours, when the Eucharistic liturgy was celebrated, the apsidal wall paired windows with depictions of the two theophanies which Moses experienced at the Burning Bush (Exodus 3) and when receiving the Tables of the Law (Exodus 31, 18). Penetrating the openings, sunlight substantiated the Divine Presence inside the church.⁶⁹ Below the two windows, on the semidome of the apse, the Transfiguration was depicted in a manner which testifies that the concept behind the decorative programme was rooted in the conceptual synthesis found in Pseudo-Dionysius. The figure of Christ is shown against a mandorla whose dark centre connects the vision to the thought expressed in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, in which

Pseudo-Dionysius places God in darkness. The power of Sinai's location extracted Christ from this protective darkness in order to reward the pilgrim with a life-changing sight.⁷⁰ Position, size, and luminosity set the Christic revelation in a hierarchical relation to the theophanies of Moses.⁷¹ Lit by a hanging chandelier, the Transfiguration emitted a light qualitatively different from that entering through the windows. Fleshed out by incense smoke during the morning liturgy, the light that animated the Mosaic theophanies was impressive, but its rise, movement, and waning during the morning service drew attention to its transient nature.⁷² By contrast, the light emitted by the body of Christ when the glass mosaic reflected the chandelier's light was constant and likely continuous.⁷³ The essentially theophanic character of the site and its secluded position indicate that whoever travelled to it did not do so in search of a *mise-en-scène* to be understood symbolically. Rather, as confirmed by the effects discernible inside the church, they sought to see the divine light with their physical eyes.

While the Sinai church confirms the literalness of these settings' revelatory function, Churches built around the northern shores of the Adriatic sea a few decades after the construction of Hagia Sophia further testify that the concept of hierarchy was a key intention of cultic architecture from the reign of Justinian.⁷⁴ Although varied in form, these buildings reproduce, in my view, the same effect I propose for Hagia Sophia, namely, the promotion of the clerical and imperial hierarchies as images of the divine order. Designed with a less refined audience than Hagia Sophia's in mind, these churches make use of figural decoration in order to draw attention to the iconic dimension of the episcopate. The human hierarchy that the compartmentalisation of the space created at floor level was paired with corresponding heavenly inhabitants depicted above, on the walls. The churches that survive in sufficient condition to permit any detailed analysis demonstrate enough decorative similarities with Justinianic commissions and each other, both to ascribe them to the same generation and connect them with Constantinople. This allows us to extrapolate elements extant in one example in order to gain insight into what other sites have lost. Usually of basilical plan, these churches structured the human community in a consistent way. Members of the clergy, regular believers, sinners, and the unbaptised occupied spaces arranged along the building's longitudinal axis: the presbytery, nave, and narthex. At the same time, further sub-categories were created and made visible through the use of side areas in the aisles and/or galleries, for women,

virgins, and socially or spiritually prominent individuals. The solea, ambo, or raised floors were used to enhance the visibility of these distinctions, while the senior clergy was displayed at the apex of the space on the *synthronon*, which placed the bishop directly beneath the image of Christ.

The basilica in Classe (c.549) was dedicated to the founder of the Church of Ravenna, Saint Apollinaris. Bishop Maximian (546–56) exploited his personal connections with Constantinople to enhance the richness of the interior decoration and decorated the church in the latest fashion.⁷⁵ A ninth-century source reports that ‘No church in any part of Italy is similar to this one in precious stones, since they glow at night almost as much as they do during the day’.⁷⁶ Of this marvellous decorative programme, only the Proconnesian columns and capitals and the mosaic decoration of the arch and apse survive. The iconographic scheme in the apse, where the bishops of Ravenna are shown in heaven below Apollinaris, who is depicted as a Christic figure, amounts to ‘an apotheosis of the episcopal office that has no equal in Christian art’.⁷⁷ This concept would have been strengthened in the context of ritual performance. The stylised Transfiguration on the vault of the apse shows Christ as a Cross, and Peter, John, and Jacob as sheep. Below, in line with the Cross and reproducing its shape, Apollinaris is depicted standing in orant posture. Conceptually, the reduction of God to his symbol and position of Apollinaris beneath it evokes the image of Constantine on the Chalke Gate in Constantinople, pointing to the bishop as living image of Christ. The twelve sheep that flank him leave little room for mis-interpretation. The first bishop of Ravenna is a Christic figure—an identification supported by both his episcopal and martyr status. When sitting on the *cathedra*, officiating at the altar, and especially when blessing the community in front of him ‘with raised hands’ in the manner of Christ, the living person of Maximian was aligned with the depicted cross and saint.⁷⁸ One can hardly find a more direct expression of Pseudo-Dionysius’ system of downward, specular projection of the divine image than this scene where the cross, the saint, and the living bishop substantiate it in a progression radiating from the abstract cross, through the vague presence of the mosaic portrait, to the materiality of the living body. As Pseudo-Dionysius argued, Maximian, as bishop, was presented as the first of the human hierarchy to see God and the last of the celestial hierarchy to embody the divine image.

Across the Adriatic, the survival of the *synthronon* area in the Basilica of Euphrasius (c.560) in Poreč casts light on an important aspect, namely,

the point where the ritual performers, architecture, and decoration converged. Under the triple representation of Christ the *cathedra* set the bishop against a background made of the most luminous materials of the time: red and green porphyry, and mother-of-pearl.⁷⁹ The marble panels functioned as monumentalised haloes for the clergy: the stylised Golgotha in red porphyry surmounted by a gilded Cross functioning as a sort of halo behind the bishop's head, and rectangular panels in porphyry functioning as haloes for the two clerics sitting beside him (Fig. 6.3). The rest of the clergy on the *synthronon* were also set against panels made of rich marbles, but in their case the halo effect was lacking. Enabling the bishop to sit motionless beneath the image of Christ, surrounded by shimmering decorative materials, the *cathedra* worked towards integrating the bishop into the ranks of depicted characters and towards presenting him as the bridge between the human and the divine communities. In keeping with the concept detailed by Pseudo-Dionysius, this setting presented the bishop simultaneously as apex of the human community and intercessor between human and heavenly ranks through his identification as image of Christ. Donning the purple garment that only Christ and the emperor alone shared across the empire, flanked, like Christ, by an entourage wearing white, and placed at the head of a hierarchically displayed community, the bishop embodied the image of God for the common believers.

Begun in 526 and consecrated in 547 or 548, when Ravenna was the capital of Justinian's western exarchate, the Church of San Vitale represents the most coherent synthesis of the principles I have discussed. Celebrating the city's new imperial role, the decoration of this church promotes the episcopal and imperial hierarchies. Nonetheless, unlike in the case of Hagia Sophia, the designers of San Vitale made use of figural decoration to render the relationship between the human and the divine hierarchies clear. Furthermore, the smaller scale of this building when compared to the Constantinopolitan cathedral led to an accentuation of the spatial and visual effects, thus making the recognition of underlying principles easier to grasp. Stark differences in volume, lighting, and decorative materials stressed the hierarchical character of the spaces that succeeded on the main axis. Lit distinctively and each decorated with a type of material selected on account of its reflectivity, the narthex (stucco), ambulatory and nave (marble), presbytery (stone mosaic), and apse (glass mosaic) created a succession of luminous spaces.



Fig. 6.3 Episcopal *cathedra* from the Basilica Euphrasiana in Poreč (ca. 560) (Photo credit Vladimir Ivanovici. Reproduced with kind permission of the Porečke i Pulske Biskupije)

In the presbytery and apse the sequential character of the space is further stressed through the figurative decoration. Here, the characters are depicted in increasingly 'luminous colours'.⁸⁰ The focus of the decoration and its most 'luminous' point is represented by the portrait of Christ the Logos depicted on the semidome of the apse. Wearing purple, he is shown sitting on a blue orb and flanked by angels dressed in white, Saint Vitalis wearing the costume of sixth-century potentates, and Bishop Ecclesius (522–32), the church's founder, in the episcopal purple. Below, mosaic panels draw attention to the reflection of the divine hierarchy in

the imperial one, with Justinian depicted similar to Christ, wearing purple and flanked by an entourage dressed in contrasting colours. Lower still, the clerical hierarchy on the *synthronon* was legitimised in the same manner: sitting on the *cathedra* under the image of Christ, the bishop also wore purple garments and was flanked by priests dressed in white.⁸¹

The setting in San Vitale served several functions, simultaneously popularising the concept of multiple heavens, structuring the human community in hierarchical manner, and establishing the clergy and imperial court as images of the divine hierarchy. The person entering the church and proceeding from the narthex towards the apse was afforded an ascension-like experience, the same that structured a Christian's life. In theory, one could gradually advance through all stages of the human hierarchy, from unbaptised individual in the atrium, to catechumen in the narthex, baptised Christian in the nave, junior member of the clergy in the presbytery, senior member of the clergy on the *synthronon* in the apse, and eventually bishop on the *cathedra*.

As Christianity grew in popularity and eventually pervaded early Byzantine society, the vast majority of individuals in Christian communities was made of regular believers. Statistically speaking, the majority of believers would be entitled to occupy the nave, with brief periods spent in penitence in the narthex. Clergy in its various ranks would represent various levels of spiritual perfection and would identify themselves with scriptural characters. Within this dynamic, what emerged as the most important consequence of the design of settings such as those in Ravenna, Poreč, and elsewhere, was the promotion of social hierarchy as natural and the 'othering' of the clergy from the lay community. Justinian and his successors on the imperial throne gained legitimacy from the staging of the liturgy by virtue of the presentation of episcopal authority as a reflection of imperial power. As high-status imperial officers and delegates of imperial power, bishops functioned within the context of Roman notions of authority. Their iconic dimension likewise drew on that of the emperor. This is most evident in San Vitale, where the bishop on the *cathedra* was flanked by the panels depicting the imperial court in the manner magistrates were in the period. The magistrate exercised power in the emperor's absence in the context of spaces of power that belonged to or which quoted those used by the ruler. The authority that the magistrate thus gained and the iconic dimension that came with it were nevertheless shown as deriving from the emperor by means of the display of imperial portraits alongside him.⁸² Similarly, in

San Vitale, the presentation of the bishop as an image of Christ pointed out to Justinian's own iconic function through the conspicuous presence of mosaic panels depicting his court. In having the advantage of singularity (bishops, by contrast, were ubiquitous), emperors retained the capacity to embody the notion of absolute (divine) authority better than anyone else.

CONCLUSIONS

As Peter Brown has pointed out, Christianity's most challenging endeavour and most impressive success was the Christianisation of the *mundus*, the underlying structure of the world. This, Brown argued, required a 'slow, hard labour on the imagination of an entire society, in order to produce (through constant dialogue and confrontation with non-Christians) a clearly focused Christian thought-world. In this immense imaginative adventure, churches great and small represented fragile islands of Christian order'.⁸³ The churches of Justinian reproduced the sequential cosmic structure that was widely recognised as natural in Late Antiquity and populated it with Christians. Whether directly through his own commissions, or indirectly through legislative measures and by facilitating Mediterranean trade, Justinian contributed to disseminate an 'imperial style' in church interiors. This implied a hierarchical organisation of the interiors through an attentively devised interplay of space and lighting.⁸⁴ Such strategy was employed to structure human communities in a manner that conformed to the imperial idea of hierarchy. An array of artifices embedded in church architecture, decoration, and ritual performance instigated a feeling of entering into heaven and connecting with angelic orders in the users of such spaces. This strategy was deployed to promote sacraments as capable of collapsing heaven and earth and sanctioning the hierarchical organisation of communities.

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NOTES

1. Scholarly attention has focused primarily on the relationship between Pseudo-Dionysius and Gothic and Byzantine architecture. Interest in the possible Dionysian influence on architectural forms began with Panofsky (1946), who related the emergent Gothic architecture of Abbot Suger with the CD. Later scholars focused on supporting or disproving this thesis. For a recent discussion, with comprehensive bibliography on the topic, see Bogdanović (2011) and Dell'Acqua (2014). On the CD and sixth-century architecture, see below. Given the extensive bibliography existing on many of the subjects addressed in the present text, bibliographical references are indicative rather than exhaustive.
2. The two modes through which divine notions are transmitted are discussed in detail in *CH* II.ii-iii:137C–141C; 10–13; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 148–50).
3. Kilde (2008).
4. Maguire (1987, 83).
5. For example, the identification of odours and lights present during the liturgy as symbols of divine realities in *CH* I.iii:121C–D; 8–9; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 146).
6. *CH* II.iv:141D–144A; 13–15; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 151). Paulinus, *Poems* 27.549–53, 285–8; Davis-Weyer (trans.) (2003, 19), in turn, spoke of those whose ‘belly is their god’. Through the interplay of architecture, decoration, lighting, iconography, and inscriptions, Paulinus admits to trying to beguile the audience in order to divert their attention towards holy things and instil in them the sentiment of the saint’s presence. On the complex at Cimitile/Nola, see Lehmann (2004) and de la Portbarré-Viard (2006); on the manipulation of the audience there, see Ivanovici (2016, 14–18). On the staging of theophanic encounters in late antique Christian shrines in general, see Hahn (1997) and Ivanovici (2016).
7. *EH* IV.iii.1:476A; 97–8; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 226) (amended).
8. *EH* II.ii.5:376D; 70–1; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 199).
9. *CH* I.iii:121CD; 8–9; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 146) (italics mine).
10. It was during baptism, from the fourth century onwards, that Christians were exposed to staged effects intended to sustain the religion’s capacity to summon the divine, see Ivanovici (2016, 19–123). On Pseudo-Dionysius’ awareness of the artifices used during the initiation ritual, see Ivanovici (2016, 126–9).
11. The idea is presented synthetically by Macrobius (395–423), *Comm. in Somn. Scip.* 1.14.15, 145.

12. Shaw (2014, 24–5). The clearest example is represented by Mithraism, a cult in which believers were assimilated to one of seven initiatory degrees that corresponded to the cosmic levels of the solar system. Through successive stages of initiation, one advanced both ontologically and cosmically. On this, see Ivanovici (2016, 28–31).
13. On the imitation of Jesus as the only canon during the first three centuries CE, a period when Christianity lacked conformity of practice, see Schneemelcher (2003, 18).
14. See, for example, Moss (2010).
15. See, for example, Brown (1996).
16. Elm (2004).
17. On the sixth century as cultural threshold, see the contributions in Allen and Jeffreys (eds.) (1996) and Maas (2005).
18. Brown (2012, 517).
19. *CH* III.ii:165A; 17–19; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 154) (*italics mine*).
20. *EH* V.vi:505A–B; 108–9; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 236) (*amended, italics mine*). On the iconicity of the bishop, see *CH* XII.ii:292D–298A; 42–3; *EH* II.iii.3:400B; 75.
21. Schulz (1964) traced in synthetic manner the typological and revelatory dimension of the Eucharistic liturgy in the work of the Church Fathers. For the way in which the concept was displayed in the Hagia Sophia, see Schulz (1964, 57–90).
22. On the early Byzantine ritual, see, for example, Taft (1992). For further bibliography on the topic, see Marinis (2014, 10 n. 1). The episcopal impersonation of Jesus was not restricted to churches, however, with bishops also ‘playing’ Jesus during ceremonies and rituals taking place in external environments, see Ivanovici (*forthcoming*). For the episcopal embodying of Christ in later Byzantine culture, see Woodfin (2012).
23. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Funebris oratio in laudem Basilii Magni* (Orat. 43), PG 36:561–64; McLynn (trans.) (2004, 254).
24. On the believers’ incapacity to know God without visual prompts, see Ivanovici (2016, esp. 46–7).
25. Marinis (2014, 2015) focuses on the meaning ascribed to church space in Byzantium from the eighth century onwards and nuanced scholarly approaches to Byzantine cultic architecture, which thus far have been considered mainly through a functionalist perspective that sees architectural form as shaped primarily by ritual needs, in line with the thesis introduced by Mathews (1971). A similar debate on the role symbolism, ritual, preexisting models, or movement played in shaping Christian cultic architecture exists for the late antique period; see de Blaauw (2008) and Brandt (2014). Mango (1991) classifies scholarly approaches

- to Byzantine architecture as functional, symbolic, typological, and socio-economic. The present study adopts a wider definition of ‘symbolism’, which encompasses ritual needs and political agendas when addressing its role in shaping sixth-century architecture.
26. For example, Elsner (1994), Isar (2011), Schibille (2014a), and Pentcheva (2017).
 27. As pointed out by Janes (1998, 12), ‘The ritual stage is a place for making a view of the world clear, though that view may be a fiction’.
 28. Hagia Sophia, as well as Saints Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople, San Vitale in Ravenna, Sant’Apollinare in Classe, Saint Catherine on Sinai, Sant’Eufemia in Grado, the Basilica Euphrasiana in Poreč, the Red Monastery in Sohag, Santi Cosma e Damiano, and San Lorenzo f.l.m. in Rome, can be ascribed to the same ‘generation’ on account of similarities in the articulation of space, decorative technique, and iconographic concept.
 29. Drawing on the features of the liturgical rites described in the *CD*, Gavriluk (2008) and Mainoldi (2016a) advance the idea that Pseudo-Dionysius lived in Constantinople. Furthermore, Mainoldi (2016b, 2017) see the views expressed in the *CD* as reflecting those promoted by Justinian, who might have helped disseminate them across the empire, if not stimulated their writing.
 30. On the churches and policies of Justinian, see below. For intellectuals close to Justinian promoting liturgical performances as theophanic, see Hypatius of Ephesus (531–8), a counsellor of Justinian on theological matters who shared Pseudo-Dionysius’ view on the anagogic potential of the sacraments’ setting; the descriptions of Hagia Sophia by Procopius of Caesarea (c.500–60), a historian and advisor of Justinian’s star general, Belisarius; and Paul the Silentiary (d. 580), author of the *ekphrasis* on Hagia Sophia that was read at the church’s rededication in 562, who conceptualises the sacraments and liturgical space in a similar manner: as a manifestation of the divine liturgy and order.
 31. See, for example, Alchermes (2005).
 32. On architecture, see Ousterhout (1998, 91–2). On changes to liturgical practice, see Taft (1992) and Marinis (2014, 11).
 33. Mainstone (1988), Isar (2004a, b, 2011), O’Meara (2005), Schibille (2009, 2014a, b), Pentcheva (2010, 45–56; 2011, 2017), Inanici (2014), Teteriatnikov (2017, 233–52), and Bogdanović (2017, 267–94).
 34. Miller (2009, 10) and Schibille (2014a, 15–18).
 35. The Royal Doors were indeed aligned, but only members of the imperial and clerical hierarchy were permitted to use them.
 36. Gavril (2012).

37. On the cosmic dimension of the dome in Antiquity and Late Antiquity, see Lehmann (1945), Baldwin Smith (1950), and Hauteceur (1954); and the contributions in Croci, Ivanovici (eds.) (2018).
38. On the capacity of centralised spaces to ‘make present’, as opposed to the underlying dynamic process of ‘becoming’ in longitudinal layouts, see Törönen (2007, 150).
39. Bradley (2009, 89) argues that in the time of Pliny, ‘Marble watching was a complex and highly sophisticated process that evoked a wide range of aesthetic, cultural and ethnographic associations’. For the perception of marble in Late Antiquity and Byzantium, see Sodini (1994), Barry (2007), Pentcheva (2011), and Küllerich (2012).
40. The interpretative key can be found in encyclopaedic works such as Pliny the Elder’s (23–79 CE) *Natural History* or Isidore of Sevilla’s (c.560–636) *Etymologies*. On the mosaic decoration’s floral implication, see, e.g., Roberts (1989). On the marble’s watery relations, see Barry (2007) and Pentcheva (2011).
41. Marble types were usually associated each with a distinct geographic area, thus allowing for a political discourse on the richness of the owner and, in state commissioned buildings, on the expanse of the empire. In San Vitale in Ravenna, Fiorentini and Orioli (2003), have identified twenty-three types of marble, while in the Basilica Euphrasiana in Poreč, all types of marble known in the period (around thirty) are attested, according to Terry (1986). Contrastingly, in Hagia Sophia, only ten or eleven types are found; cf. Schibille (2014a, Appendix).
42. See, for example, Maguire (2012) and Schibille (2014a).
43. This is the view emerging from Venantius Fortunatus’ (c.535–605) description of churches in Gaul; cf. de la Portbarré-Viard (2009, 6–13). Upon moving to Gaul, after having studied in Ravenna for twelve years, Venantius Fortunatus applied to local churches the impressions he received in those of Ravenna. On this, see Ivanovici (2016, 137–42), with bibliography.
44. *Enkainia kontakion*, Trypanis (ed.) (1968) and Palmer and Rodley (trans.) (1988).
45. Macrides and Magdalino (1988) and Schibille (2014a, 37–41).
46. Schibille (2014a, 38).
47. The Eucharistic liturgy began with the bishop censuring the area of the altar, but textual and iconographic sources also indicate the presence of censers at the thresholds and next to liturgically important places inside the church. For the initial censuring, see *EH* III.ii:425B; 80, 9; for the doors, see the illumination in the sixth-century Ashburnam Pentateuch, MS nouv. acq. lat. 2334, fols. 76r and 127r; for the altar, see Narsai (c.399–502) *Liturgical Homilies*, 17, 281. On incense in Late Antiquity,

- see Harvey (2006). On incense smoke fleshing out the Divine during the ritual, see Bouras and Parani (2008, 20–9) and Pentcheva (2010, 37).
48. In 2Chr 7:1–2, following Solomon’s consecration prayer, the Divine Presence is said to descend and *fill* the interior of the Temple. Although invisible, the Presence gained substance by its precise location inside the Temple walls, an effect underlined by the biblical text, which mentions that the priests could not enter the Temple because it was *filled* by the Presence.
 49. This effect is mentioned by sources dating from the fifth to the ninth century. See Isar (2004b, 233; 2011, 66) and Ivanovici (2016, 139–40).
 50. Ivanovici (2015).
 51. Pentcheva (2017) argues for the church building and the choir members inside becoming images of god on account of their being filled with the divine. As images of God, those taking part in the ritual are, nonetheless, “non-representational”, with them embodying a new concept of image developed by the Church Fathers in Late Antiquity (Pentcheva 2017, esp. 11 and 77, cf. Vasiliu 2010). While I support her identification of the church as a container of the divine presence, I argue that the iconic dimension of those taking part in the ritual was very much a visual phenomenon. On this, see Ivanovici (forthcoming).
 52. *Enkainia kontakion* Trypanis (ed.) (1968, 17:147); Palmer, Rodley (trans.) (1988, 144).
 53. *CH* II.iii:140C; 12, 3; Luijckheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 149).
 54. On Hellenistic rulers, see, for example, Versnel (2011, 439–92). On Roman emperors, see, for example, Neri (forthcoming).
 55. Ivanovici (forthcoming).
 56. Paulinus of Nola, *Poems* 28.180–5:299; Franses (2003, 19).
 57. On the hymn, see Taft (1980–1981).
 58. Tsakiridou (2013, 71).
 59. Krueger (2005, 2014) and Frank (2006).
 60. The process that enabled the embodiment of religious characters, and even gods, constitutes the subject of a forthcoming monographic study by the author, provisionally titled, *Chosen Vessels. Embodying the Divine in Late Antiquity*.
 61. Muth (2007).
 62. Paul the Silentiary, *Description of the ambo* vv. 240ff., 257ff. Mentions the lay audience’s frenzied efforts to touch the Gospel book as it was carried through the nave to be read from the ambo.
 63. Alchermes (2005, 354–70) with bibl. See Justinian’s strict building rules in the case of the Nativity Church in Bethlehem, recently studied by Bacci (2017, 59–112, esp. 61–3).

64. On lighting, see *Nov. 67 proem. ad c. 2*, 344; Onasch (1993, 132). On reading, see *Nov. 137*, 695–9, trans. and discussed in Krueger (2014, 106–7).
65. The dedication of the church to Saint Catherine dates to a later period.
66. On the construction and decoration, see Forsyth and Weitzmann (1973). On the collapsing of the visions, see Elsner (1995, 99–124).
67. Elsner and Wolf (2010) and Pentcheva (2014–2015).
68. On the role light played in the setting and decoration, see Elsner (1994), Nelson (2006), and Schellewald (2014).
69. Elsner (1995, 118–19).
70. Andreopoulos (2002) and Schibille (2014a, 153–4).
71. Elsner (1995, 97–124) speaks of a hierarchy of theophanies.
72. A visual rendition of Paul's (2Cor 3) discourse on the transient character of Moses' glory compared to that of Christians.
73. Around-the-clock illumination was *the* mark of powerful sanctuaries in the time and an element that was certainly provided by the imperial commission of the site.
74. It is still debated whether Justinian's contribution was active or passive. Procopius' (*On Buildings* I.8.5, 70) statement that the emperor had placed an imperial monopoly on church building, alongside evidence that similar decorative elements were made at the imperial-controlled marble quarries in Proconnesus and Thasos (where private workshops also operated), and the discovery of the Marzamemi B shipwreck that carried the seemingly complete liturgical furnishings for a church, all seem to indicate that Justinian is to be credited with the direct dissemination of this style. Nevertheless, a recent analysis by Dugdale (2017) suggests that private commissions carried more weight than imperial ones. On marble trade in the period, see Sodini (1989), Castagnino Berlinghieri and Paribeni (2015), and Marsili (2015).
75. Commissioned by Bishop Ursicinus (533–6), the church was finished and dedicated in 549 by Bishop Maximian whom Deichmann (1976, 233–4) credits with the entire decoration. For an introduction to the church, see Mauskopf Deliyannis (2010, 259–74) and Jäggi (2013, 259–82).
76. Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna* 63:232–3; Mauskopf Deliyannis (trans.) (2004, 179).
77. von Simson (1948, 41).
78. Germanus of Constantinople, *On the divine liturgy* 26, 76–7. On the prayer with raised hands and assimilation of Apollinaris with the officiating priest, see von Simson (1948, 54) and Filipová (2014, 435).
79. Terry (1986) and Terry and Maguire (2007).
80. In Late Antiquity, colours were judged according to their imagined luminosity. According to Muscolino (1997), twelve colours in three to eight hues each were used in the mosaics in San Vitale. See the discussion in Ivanovici (2016, 133–99).

81. In the apses of San Vitale, the Basilica Euphrasiana in Poreč, and Sant'Agnese in Rome (c.630), bishops are depicted wearing the purple costume Christ wears in San Vitale. On the white-clad priests, see Venantius Fortunatus, *Poems* 2.9.21–36:64.
82. For example the diptych of Rufius Probianus (c.400), Staatsbibliothek, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, MS theol. lat. fol. 323.
83. Brown (2011, 25).
84. See the difference in artificial illumination between the nave and sacristy of the Lateran basilica in the *Liber Pontificalis* I, 172–3.

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‘Visual Thinking’ and the Influence of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in the Homilies and Hymns of Andrew of Crete

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Only to those who had been divinely taught to discern divine realities, who had been purified by nearness to the divine, only to them did the most Holy One make known impressions [*apomorgmata*], as it were, of this mystery, lifting the intellectual curtain in a silence and an unknowing far above speech, to reveal some portion of the hidden, secret glory within.¹

Passages such as the above, which occasionally appear in the homilies and hymns of the early eighth-century teacher and bishop, St Andrew of Crete, reveal his sympathy for the theological writings of the shadowy—but influential—sixth-century writer who is known as (Pseudo-)Dionysius the Areopagite.² Andrew believed the latter to be a first-century apostle and follower of St Paul: this attribution would only be questioned

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seriously in the late Middle Ages, beginning in the West.³ For Andrew, the author of the corpus of four treatises, including *On the Divine Names*, *The Mystical Theology*, and *The Celestial and Ecclesiastical Hierarchies*, was thus an authoritative voice within Christian tradition.⁴ As a composer of liturgical works for the great feasts of the Eastern Church, as well as for ordinary Sundays and saints' days, Andrew of Crete understood the Christian life as leading towards a mystical encounter with the unknowable God.⁵ He frequently employed language that was borrowed from Dionysius's writings in order to express the ways in which human beings apprehend the immanence of God in creation. Such divine manifestations could, according to Andrew, take place in religious ritual, especially in the mysteries or sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, in the divine words of scripture, in encounters with holy people, or with the help of material objects such as the cross or relics. Whether or not Andrew of Crete extended such mediating power to man-made objects, especially the painted icons that would become such a focus of controversy in the course of his life, remains unclear.⁶ He did not mention holy images often in his surviving works, usually preferring to stress God's impression on other aspects of the created world.

This chapter will build on an initial study of Dionysius the Areopagite's influence on Andrew of Crete, which I published in a recent festschrift for the eminent Orthodox theologian, Fr Andrew Louth.⁷ Although some of the ideas that will be covered in the present study were first explored there, I hope to develop them further here—and with particular focus on the liturgical texts of Andrew of Crete. After a brief outline of the life and relevant works of this important writer, I propose to examine in more detail the influence of Dionysius on his thought. This section of the chapter will be arranged thematically, with discussion of Andrew's ideas concerning the mystical ascent to God, which he tends to place within a liturgical context, as well as of his understanding of the human or material intermediaries that are necessary to this journey. In the second half of the chapter, I will examine Andrew's attitude towards icons, or painted images of Christ, the Mother of God, and the saints. Living and teaching at the beginning of the first iconoclast period, which lasted from approximately 730–87, the archbishop of Crete must have felt the impact of a theological and disciplinary debate that was developing in the highest circles of both Church and state in the Eastern Roman empire.⁸ Preachers and hymnographers such as Andrew of Crete did not normally raise the topic of icons and their veneration in liturgical

contexts unless these holy objects represented the focus of the celebration as they would after 843, for example, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy.⁹ Nevertheless, this chapter will revisit the question of Andrew's view of the place of holy images in Christian theology and worship, placing this within the context of his wider understanding of various kinds of 'image' as mediators of divine truth and of his assimilation of the Dionysian corpus.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ST ANDREW OF CRETE

This important early Byzantine writer, who is often described in surviving liturgical collections as 'Andrew of Jerusalem', began his life in the Muslim-ruled Near East. According to a Life that was composed sometime between the late eighth and tenth centuries by a writer named Niketas,¹⁰ Andrew was born in Damascus, probably in about 660.¹¹ After remaining mute for the first seven years of his life, according to his hagiographer, Andrew was sent to receive training and monastic tonsure at the church of the Anastasis in Jerusalem.¹² At some point after the Sixth Ecumenical Council of 680–1, probably around 685, the young monk was sent to Constantinople in the company of two older clerics. It is possible that this mission was intended to convey the patriarch of Jerusalem's acceptance of the recent Council to the Byzantine emperor, Constantine IV (668–85).¹³ Whereas Andrew's companions soon returned to Jerusalem, he remained in Constantinople. After spending 'numerous years' in a solitary monastic cell within the imperial city, Andrew was ordained a deacon of Hagia Sophia, and then put in charge of an orphanage and of another charitable foundation (probably for the care of the elderly) near the district of Eugeniou in Constantinople.¹⁴ Following these honours, which appear to have been bestowed by one of several emperors who reigned in the late seventh or early eighth century, Andrew was appointed archbishop of Gortyna on the island of Crete. This ordination must have occurred some time before 711, when Andrew, along with the future patriarch Germanus, signed an edict published by the emperor Philippikos Bardanes that rejected the decisions of the Sixth Ecumenical Council and re-introduced Monothelite doctrine as the official imperial policy.¹⁵ Andrew of Crete's subsequent change of heart with regard to this question was expressed in a set of iambic verses which he addressed to the archdeacon Agathon, who had been assigned the work of re-publishing the Acts of the Council after

the deposition of Philippikos in 713. According to August Heisenberg, the verses refer both to the return of a book, which provided the occasion for this missive, and to Andrew's reversal of opinion with regard to Monotheletism.¹⁶ Scholars including Alexander Kazhdan have pointed to this incident as evidence that Andrew was not only capable of changing his mind with regard to doctrinal matters, but also that he may have been lenient towards Christians who fell into error and needed to be brought back to right belief.¹⁷

As archbishop of Crete, Andrew experienced Arab raids on the island, including one in which he took refuge with his flock within a fortress known as 'tou Drimeos',¹⁸ as well as famine and several outbreaks of the plague.¹⁹ According to Niketas, the archbishop nevertheless managed to found several churches, including one in honour of the Virgin Mary of Blachernai, and to build a house for the care of the sick and elderly during his sojourn on Crete.²⁰ Towards the end of his life, probably in about 730, Andrew returned to Constantinople. Whereas Niketas suggests that the archbishop undertook this journey in order to seek imperial help for dealing with the famine that was ravaging Crete,²¹ Marie-France Auzépy has more recently proposed that he was recalled to the imperial city by the iconoclast emperor, Leo III, because of his open defence of icons.²² She supports this hypothesis by citing various works, including a fragment in defence of icons that is attributed to Andrew,²³ a homily in which he appears to denounce the emperor and his court,²⁴ and his manifest support for the cults both of the Theotokos and of other saints, as witnessed in numerous homilies and hymns. I shall return to this evidence in the second half of this chapter; for now, suffice to say that it fails to convince me fully of Andrew of Crete's outspoken support for the manufacture and veneration of icons—nor does it justify dismissing Niketas's more straightforward account for the archbishop's return to Constantinople. In any case, after staying in the imperial city for an unspecified period of time, Andrew stopped off at a place called Erissos on the island of Lesbos as he travelled back to Crete, probably in 740, and died there. His relics were placed in the church of St Anastasia at Mitylene and his memory continues to be celebrated in the Orthodox Church on 4 July.²⁵

Andrew is mainly remembered for his numerous liturgical writings, which include both hymns and homilies. Sections of his most famous work, known as the Great Canon, are sung to this day in the daily services of Compline during the first week of Lent, and the work is

performed in its entirety in Matins on the Wednesday or Thursday of the fifth week.²⁶ A number of other hymns, including canons, stichera, and idiomela, are attributed to Andrew of Crete in the surviving liturgical books.²⁷ However, as in the case of other Byzantine hymnographers, much work remains to be done both on the recovery of other, unedited, works, and on proving the attribution of the published hymns. It is difficult on the basis of current research to identify particular features, either stylistic or in terms of content, that might indicate Andrew's authorship. Some, such as the inclusion of the second ode or of theotokia (short stanzas in honour of the Virgin Mary) at the end of each ode, might indicate Constantinopolitan—if not Andrean—authorship of certain canons.²⁸ For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on a selection of published hymns without attempting to justify their attribution to Andrew. Such work remains for those scholars who are already beginning to explore and analyse the numerous—and frequently unedited—works not only of Andrew, but also of other Byzantine hymnographers.

The large corpus of homilies that are attributed to Andrew of Crete also requires further investigation. In the seventeenth-century, François Combefis, a French Dominican scholar, edited most of these texts from single manuscripts that belonged to the French royal library, and can now be found in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris.²⁹ Like most other patristic and early Byzantine homilies, these texts were gathered into liturgical collections from about the late eighth century onwards.³⁰ Following their initial delivery on the feast-days of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and martyrs and saints of the Church, such homilies became 'readings' for both public and private consumption. All of Andrew's homilies lack critical editions, and many still await detailed study. Nevertheless, it is possible to examine both the influence of Dionysius the Areopagite on Andrew and the latter's attitude towards icons on the basis of the published texts that are accepted as genuine. In the discussion that follows, I shall focus especially on Andrew's trilogy of sermons on the Dormition of the Virgin, in which he openly acknowledges the Areopagitic corpus, as well as on certain other homilies that reveal its influence. Certain themes, such as the Christian ascent—especially by liturgical means—towards an unapproachable God, the 'imprint' or image of God in creation, and above all, the way in which the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies facilitate an encounter between the divine and created worlds, appear frequently in many of Andrew's homilies and hymns.

THE INFLUENCE OF DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE ON ANDREW OF CRETE

Andrew's most explicit mention of Dionysius occurs in his second homily on the Dormition.³¹ In the course of expounding the mystery that surrounded 'the immaculate, supernatural passing of the Mother of God',³² Andrew invokes the witness of 'a man learned in sacred doctrine, who, they say, investigated holy things with wisdom and erudition, and to whom hints of the mysterious representations of super-celestial minds were revealed, in a way worthy of angels'.³³ He goes on to name this man as Dionysius, writing, 'He knew much about divine realities, heard great secrets about heaven and about the many forms and shapes of the unspeakable names of God'.³⁴ Andrew then quotes the passage in *On the Divine Names* in which the late fifth- or early sixth-century mystical writer—who pretended to be one of Jesus Christ's earliest followers—describes the sight of 'the body that was our source of life, the vessel of God', that is, the Virgin Mary as she lay on her death-bed.³⁵ Although some scholars have suggested that this passage refers to Christ's body, as manifested in the Eucharist, rather than to Mary,³⁶ there can be no doubt that Andrew, like other patristic and Byzantine exegetes, treated it as an eye-witness account of the Virgin's final hours.³⁷

The references to Dionysius's thought go further than this, however, not only in Andrew's homilies on the Dormition but also in other sermons and hymns. After opening up the subject by alluding to the 'divine realities' that are revealed, as if in 'impressions',³⁸ only to those who have been purified in his first oration,³⁹ Andrew continues to use language—sometimes borrowed from Dionysius—that expresses the mystery and unknowability of divine truth. He exclaims, for example:

If only we, too, illumined by this present feast of light, could be found worthy of the supernal glory of that light above all light, and could see the mystery clearly for ourselves! If only we could receive at least a modest ray of mystical initiation and express ourselves clearly, even if we are incapable of doing justice to that ineffable life of hers! These are unknowable realities...⁴⁰

Dionysius also hints at the inaccessibility of God, but suggests at various points in his treatises that liturgical worship helps Christians to draw closer to him. He uses metaphors involving light and illumination in

order to convey the process by which the faithful gain spiritual awareness, as we see in the following passage from *On the Divine Names*:

With our minds made prudent and holy, we offer worship to that which lies hidden beyond thought and beyond being. With a wise silence we do honour to the inexpressible. We are raised up to the enlightening beams of the sacred scriptures, and with these to illuminate us, with our beings shaped to songs of praise, we behold the divine light, in a manner befitting us...⁴¹

Light plays an important role in Dionysius's vision of God's interaction with created beings. It proceeds outward from the 'source of divinity', that is, the Father, and makes itself known through the hierarchy of angels. It also manifests itself in Jesus Christ, whom Dionysius calls 'the Light of the Father, the "true light enlightening every man coming into the world" (John 1:9) "through whom we have obtained access" (Romans 5:2; cf. Ephesians 2:18, 3:12) to the Father, the light which is the source of all light'.⁴² Like Dionysius, Andrew understands this light to manifest itself not only through divine or heavenly agents, but also—at a lower level—through material objects including scripture, the sacraments, and other holy symbols.

Andrew's references to Dionysius the Areopagite tend to be implicit, rather than explicit, in many homilies and hymns. He speaks frequently of the spiritual ascent from material to immaterial reality in his homily on the Transfiguration,⁴³ as we see in the following lines in its prologue:

Let us take off the material, shadowy life that we wear, and put on 'the robe woven from above as a single whole' (cf. John 19:23), made beautiful in every part by the rays of spiritual virtue. Christ himself, the pure goal of life, the supernatural Word of the One who begot him, the One who came down from above for our sakes and became a poor man in our flesh out of love for humanity, wishes us – who are already purified in life and mind, who have been given the spiritual wings of sincere thoughts – to make this ascent with him.⁴⁴

The tropological, or moral, interpretation of the story of the Transfiguration, according to which Christians climb Mount Tabor with Christ and his three disciples and witness his divine manifestation, is adopted by many Byzantine preachers in response to this major Dominical feast.⁴⁵ For Andrew, however, this metaphorical ascent takes

on mystical meaning as he urges his congregation ‘leave the realm of what is visible and intelligible and ... to be initiated, by an excess of light, into what is above human power’.⁴⁶ He goes on to relate this spiritual journey to the liturgical celebration of the feast of the Transfiguration, as we see in the following passage:

This is what we celebrate in our feast today then: the divinisation of nature, its change for the better, and the displacement and ascent of what conforms to nature, towards what is above nature.⁴⁷

Andrew of Crete understands the liturgical worship that takes place in church, which has been preceded by the required acts of purification and preparation, as leading the faithful towards contemplation of the mystery that is revealed in ‘the union and identity, in one real individual [that is, Christ], of the elements that have come together, which we know has happened in a supernatural way from the very deepest structure of the Mystery’.⁴⁸ Later in the same homily, Andrew explains the difficulties that confront human beings who seek to glimpse the glory of God:

We ourselves want now to praise this Mystery too, but are not able to do it in appropriate measure. What am I saying? Praising God in full measure is beyond even the angels, who beheld the first rays of his brilliance, and ceaselessly circle around the Godhead, which rules over all things... Often we are not permitted to form even a vague image (*phantasia*) of those blessed intelligible visions, since our intelligence is dominated by its attraction towards sensible things, and therefore our hearts find it difficult to desire what is ultimately desirable.⁴⁹

Several lines later, the preacher goes on to say that in addition to forming mental images—imperfect though these may be—Christians may attempt to express this mystery in words. Here, as Brian Daley notes, Andrew is probably referring to the composition and delivery of his own sermon on this ineffable subject.⁵⁰ For our purposes, it is worth noting that he is interested in a variety of ways in which God, as the incarnate and deified Christ on Mt Tabor, allows himself to be perceived by baptised (or to use one of Andrew’s favourite expressions, ‘initiated’) Christians. Andrew of Crete believes that God reveals himself not only in the person of Christ, but also through liturgical celebration, the inspired word of scripture, homilies, and in Christians’ collective or individual apprehension of his power.⁵¹

The idea, as expressed by Dionysius the Areopagite in the treatises on the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies, that God is surrounded by immaterial powers and angels who are mirrored by their human and clerical counterparts on earth, inspires Andrew in his homily on Palm Sunday to extol the singing and liturgical worship that occurs in church on this important feast-day. He identifies the human celebration of Christ's entrance into Jerusalem with that which occurs simultaneously in the heavenly realm, as we see in the exclamation, 'Oh, what singing! Oh, what harmony! This is the voice of the Spirit; this is the teaching of heavenly wisdom, not the mere copy of education here below!'⁵² And further, 'What could be more paradoxical than that ignorant men should sing on earth of that terrifying revelation in company with the heavenly choir, so that men might dance with angels on earth?'⁵³

Later in the same homily, Andrew discusses both the preparation (or purification), which Christians require before approaching the mystery of the Eucharist, and the transformative effect of this sacrament on each of them. It is interesting here to note his use of visual language—and specifically the word 'image'—in his description of both processes. Such language reinforces the impression that, unlike the iconoclasts, Andrew believed that God's transformative power may be understood better with the help of figural imagery. After urging the congregation to accompany Christ on his visit to Lazarus in Bethany and entrance into Jerusalem, as well as through his crucifixion and resurrection, Andrew addresses them individually, as follows:

Take for yourself a spiritual image (*eikon*), which is the perception that is impressed mystically on your heart, and then enact for me a representation of these matters. Lead the way in accompanying Christ as he journeys along the path into Bethany. Be joined with the group of disciples...⁵⁴

Later, when describing their reception of the Eucharist in terms that are intended to transport them to the 'upper room' where Christ presided over the Last Supper, Andrew writes:

Cause your heart to be spread out upon the upper story so that you may receive Christ by your side to eat that supper – not the supper in the house of Lazarus, but the mystical one and that which represents the image of the spiritual sacrifice.⁵⁵

Although this passage, at first glance, might seem to describe the Eucharist, which commemorates the Last Supper, and to infer, as iconoclasts are known to have done, that this sacrament represents only an image—rather than the actual manifestation—of Christ's body and blood,⁵⁶ it actually describes a spiritual exercise. The archbishop is attempting in this section of his sermon to induce a reverent, even mystical, state of mind in his congregation as they prepare themselves for holy Communion on the feast of the Palms.

It is worth turning briefly to Andrew's hymns in order to determine whether these show the influence of Dionysius the Areopagite's works in causing preoccupation with the 'imaging' of God in creation. Turning first to the *Great Canon*, we find Andrew emphasising the biblical idea that human beings were made according to the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1: 26).⁵⁷ When reflecting on the defacement, or discolouring, of this image by sinful thoughts and passions, Andrew employs a rich intertextual method that links other Old and New Testament references, such as Joseph's cloak of many colours (Genesis 37: 3) and the lost drachma (Luke 15: 8), with the loss of 'the first beauty of the image'.⁵⁸ In one stanza, the human image becomes an idol of his own making, as the hymnographer repents and calls to God for help.⁵⁹ This long hymn, which is preoccupied with the state of the souls of individual sinners, focuses on the human being as an image of God. Although Dionysius's influence may be present, for example, in Andrew's allusions to 'hidden things' or mysteries that are promised to those who open their hearts to God,⁶⁰ it is not dominant here.

Andrew of Crete also wrote canons for feasts including those of Lazarus, the Conception of Anna (9 December), the Nativity of the Theotokos (8 September), Mid-Pentecost, and others.⁶¹ Numerous stichera, sung in Vespers or Matins on Dominical, Marian, and saints' feasts, also survive in service-books which are used to this day in Orthodox churches.⁶² Although Andrew sometimes alludes to the mysteries that he is expounding, as in the lines, 'Your nativity is undefiled (*achrantos*), O undefiled Virgin; for your conception and birth were beyond words; your birth-giving was ineffable, O unwedded bride...', such language is typical of Marian hymnography by the time that he was writing.⁶³ The other hymns that are ascribed to him employ conventional formulae in their celebration of various feasts and daily offices.

The influence of Dionysius the Areopagite on Andrew of Crete's liturgical texts, including homilies and hymns, is thus pervasive although it

manifests itself to a greater or lesser extent depending on the subject matter. Feasts, or mysteries, such as the Dormition of the Mother of God and the Transfiguration, seem to attract the most consistent use of Dionysian themes. These include the transcendence and unknowability of the Christian God, even when he reveals himself in the Incarnation or in holy people or places, the idea that divine illumination occurs through a hierarchical structure that allows reciprocity between the heavenly and created worlds, and the function of 'images' of all kinds that reveal divine truth to the faithful. Although it is important to emphasise that Andrew also drew on other patristic sources, especially the writings of Gregory Nazianzen, for language and imagery to express such ideas, his debt to Dionysius remained significant. Andrew of Crete was above all interested in the multiple ways in which God imprints his image, or seal, on his own creation. Among such impressions, as we saw in his homilies on the Dormition and the Transfiguration, were the visual images of the mind, which could be enhanced by the use of vivid language and persuasive rhetoric.⁶⁴

ANDREW OF CRETE AND ICONOCLASM

The problem of Andrew of Crete's stance with regard to Iconoclasm has already received some attention from scholars. Marie-France Auzépy has provided the most detailed discussion of this topic to date, suggesting that various references in his works reveal Andrew's opposition to the emperor, Leo III, who was responsible for introducing iconoclastic policies.⁶⁵ Alexander Kazhdan adopted a different stance, arguing on the basis both of the paucity of such references, and because a treatise in defence of icons that is attributed to Andrew may not be authentic,⁶⁶ that he might have been an iconoclast. Although Kazhdan was unable to prove this theory conclusively, he added that Andrew's indecisive behaviour in response to the reintroduction of Monotheletism under Philippikos Bardanes could indicate that he was persuaded to join Leo III's cause.⁶⁷ I shall address the question of Andrew's attitude towards man-made icons in what remains of this chapter, first by examining again the relevant primary sources and second, by building on the discussion of Andrew's approach to the concept of 'image' that I outlined in the previous section.⁶⁸ However, it is worth repeating here that it is impossible to provide a definitive answer to this question since most of the archbishop's surviving works are liturgical. This preacher, like most others in

the Eastern Christian world, did not normally address matters relating to imperial policy or even ecclesiastical discipline in his festal or panegyric homilies and hymns.⁶⁹ Although he frequently described the various kinds of 'image' that help Christians to draw closer to God, Andrew did not allude often either to the miraculous or man-made icons that had become so important in Christian worship by the early eighth century.⁷⁰ Auzépy nevertheless cites evidence in Andrew's writings that suggests a positive attitude towards the manufacture and veneration of icons.⁷¹ The most important witness occurs in the homily on the Circumcision and on St Basil, which quotes the latter's statement that the honour offered to an image is referred to its prototype.⁷² As we know from later sources, this passage was frequently used to support the iconophile cause.⁷³ Andrew goes on in the same passage to deplore Muslims' destruction of icons and churches in the course of their raids on the island of Crete; the fact that he deplores the loss of icons here perhaps suggests his acceptance of their important place in Christian worship.⁷⁴

Another possible reference to a material icon occurs in the second homily on the Dormition of the Theotokos. According to Daley, Andrew might have instructed his congregation to gaze at an icon of Mary's tomb at Gethsemane in the course of his own sermon on this subject, as the following passage perhaps suggests. The preacher assumes here, according to the rhetorical device of *ethopoia*, the voice of the Mother of God herself:

Anyone who chooses can confirm what I am saying with his own eyes. For before the gaze of those who look on holy things with faith, there stand here clear images (*eikones*), eloquent representations of my passing. This tomb is that one carved out of rock, which stands intact even today, proclaiming with soundless voice the evidence of my burial. The hollows of that rock are incontrovertible witnesses that my body lay within it, showing, or sacredly describing (*hierographountes*), the gracious form of my limbs...⁷⁵

Andrew provides here an *ekphrasis*, or vivid description, of the tomb, calling on a putative listener to see this scene 'with his own eyes' since it appears in such 'clear images'. Although Daley's suggestion that Andrew alludes to an actual icon, which might have been placed in the nave of the church in which he was preaching, may be correct, it is also possible that this passage is intended to operate on a purely rhetorical level. Using

the device of *enargeia*, or the vivid evocation of mental images in order to induce an emotional sense of immediacy in his listeners, Andrew may simply have been conjuring up a vision of the tomb that was based on his own knowledge of the holy city and its shrines.⁷⁶ In the timeless framework of liturgical celebration, he sought to transport his congregation through space and time to the legendary moment of Mary's burial and to appoint them, along with the apostles, as witnesses.

Apart from these few passages, there are no other explicit references to man-made icons in Andrew of Crete's homilies or hymns. For this reason, it is worth turning to the treatise on holy icons that is attributed to the archbishop and which is sometimes used as evidence for his support for the production and veneration of these objects by orthodox Christians.⁷⁷ One of the most problematic aspects of this text is the fact that it survives, in fragmentary form, in just one fourteenth-century manuscript that resides now in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris.⁷⁸ The content and style of this text bears no resemblance to Andrew's other writings. It justifies the use of holy images in the Church with the help of three examples drawn from 'ancient tradition': the first two are the miraculous icons that were 'made without hands', including that which Christ sent to the toparch Abgar in Edessa and secondly the image of Mary the Theotokos that appeared on the panels of a church in Lydda or Diospolis; third, the author cites the icon of the Virgin and Child that was painted by the Evangelist Luke and which was kept either in Jerusalem or Rome. This icon was also called the 'Romaia'.⁷⁹ Such argumentation appears in several other eighth- or ninth-century texts, including the *Life of St Stephen the Younger* and the *Letter of the Three Patriarchs*.⁸⁰ In fact the similarities between such passages are so striking that it seems likely that writers employed them in an almost formulaic way when opposing the iconoclast position. In addition to the problem that such examples of miraculous or divinely sanctioned images were probably compiled in the course of the first iconoclast period, as the defenders of icons rallied their arguments in response to persecution, they are uncharacteristic of Andrew of Crete's theological method and style. Whereas one manuscript attribution might be seen as sufficient evidence for his authorship of the piece, it could also be argued that the text was written later and attributed to this distinguished author in order to ensure its survival and dissemination. I am inclined to conclude on the basis of its uncharacteristic style and content that this text does not represent an authentic work of Andrew of Crete.⁸¹

The question remains, however, whether this important liturgical writer supported or opposed the production and use of holy icons in the Church. On the basis of the authentic homilies and hymns that we examined in the first section of this chapter, it is clear that Andrew of Crete understood the powerful role of all kinds of images or symbols that God sanctions in creation. And it is likely that the debate concerning man-made icons, to the extent that it reached the archbishop in his provincial outpost, was conducted at a sophisticated level—at least by some learned officials and clerics. Andrew revealed himself in his liturgical writings to be influenced by the ideas of Dionysius the Areopagite, envisaging a celestial hierarchy that served to mediate unknowable truths with the help of various kinds of images—beginning with Christ, as the true image of the Father. As we saw in Andrew’s homilies on the Dormition and the Transfiguration, this preacher believed that the imprints of divine reality that appear in Christ, the angels, saints, and even in holy places or objects, can be viewed both physically, by means of the eyes, but also mentally, with the help of verbal stimulation either from scriptural readings or preaching. It is likely, if this hypothesis is accepted, that Andrew placed material, or man-made, icons at a lower level in the hierarchy of images.⁸² However, this is not to say that he rejected them—and, as we have seen, his surviving works simply do not provide us with enough evidence to decide this question conclusively.

Arguments in favour of Andrew’s sympathy with the iconophile position, to the extent that it had been elaborated during his lifetime, can also be adduced. This was a theologian who, even as he suggested the ineffable and mysterious nature of divine being, also saw traces, or impressions, of that reality in numerous aspects of the created world. Andrew stressed, as we have seen, the importance of physical signs, such as the hollows in the rock-cut tomb that revealed the short-lived presence of Mary’s body within its confines or the ‘splendidly decorated church’ in Gethsemane with its ‘rich [and] shining ornaments’.⁸³ His emphasis on physical objects—whether depicted in material icons or only evoked in descriptive language—promoted a sense of the potential holiness of the created world. An avenue for future study, for which there is unfortunately no space in this chapter, would be Andrew’s treatment of saints in the numerous panegyric orations that are ascribed to him.⁸⁴ It would be worth exploring whether, as in the case of hagiography that shows signs of iconoclast authorship, the archbishop stressed the virtuous lives and actions of his subjects more than he did their miraculous

acts.⁸⁵ In any case, and on the basis of the texts that have been covered in this chapter, it is worth remembering that attitudes towards the Theotokos, saints, sacraments, and both miraculous and man-made icons were not fully developed in the first few decades of the eighth century.⁸⁶ Andrew of Crete may not have felt the need to identify himself with the iconophile or iconoclast parties—especially since he spent most of the latter part of his life on an island which was both remote from the imperial city and at risk of invasion by Muslims.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has examined a selection of works by the late seventh- and early eighth-century preacher and hymnographer, Andrew of Crete, in an attempt to assess the influence of Dionysius the Areopagite on his thought. It also seeks in a more general way to explain Andrew's understanding of the concept of 'image'. Both authors posited an unknowable and transcendent God at the top of a celestial hierarchy that facilitated spiritual movement both downwards and upwards. And Andrew, like Dionysius, saw images of all kinds as essential channels by means of which God reveals himself and human beings glimpse his glory. The eighth-century archbishop employed the language of visual apprehension, but usually expected this to be understood in a metaphorical way. Thus, when he called on his congregations to 'see' or 'visualise' divine truth, he usually meant that they should be using their minds' eyes—even as they were enabled to witness biblical people and events through liturgical celebration.

Although later Orthodox tradition endowed Andrew with the correct iconophile credentials,⁸⁷ there is little in his own corpus to suggest where he stood in relation to Iconoclasm. Certain aspects of Andrew's preaching, such as his interest in saints, the cross, and the Eucharist, might suggest that he shared the iconoclast preference for these subjects as reminders—or in the case of the Eucharist, as a true image—of God in the created world.⁸⁸ However, nothing that we have examined in the course of this chapter suggests that Andrew limited the number of ways in which God manifests himself in creation. Above all, his devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, as the holy person whom Christ entered and from whom he took his human nature, suggests the archbishop's belief in the goodness of creation and eventual deification of humanity. It is likely therefore that this eloquent preacher and hymnographer defended

every kind of material image that reflects divine reality. Above all, like Dionysius the Areopagite, Andrew of Crete understood the Church and its liturgical worship as the context in which the human encounter with God takes place. His homilies and hymns assisted that encounter, employing scriptural and philosophical language that was intended to lift the faithful out of their everyday experience in order that they might participate in the cosmic celebration of God's saving dispensation.

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NOTES

1. Andrew of Crete, *Homily on the Dormition* I, PG 97:1076C; Daley (trans.) (1998) (with adjustments), 105–6. Daley argues that this homily, which is numbered as the second of the trilogy on the Dormition by J.-P. Migne in PG 97 is in fact the first; see *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 115, n. 1).
2. The literature on Dionysius the Areopagite is vast. See, for example, Louth (1989), de Andia (1997), and Coakley and Stang (2012).
3. Stang (2012, 2009). It is worth noting, however, that the ninth-century scholar and patriarch, Photios, mentioned the objections about Dionysius's apostolic date that were raised (and contested) by a priest called Theodore in a book that Photios reviewed in his *Bibliotheca*. Nigel Wilson has suggested that 'the nuance of the Greek allows one to put forward the hypothesis that Photius is here expressing in a guarded and tactful way his own scepticism'; see Photius, *The Bibliotheca*, Wilson (trans.) (1994, 27, n. 2, quoted in Louth 2009, 57).
4. A full list of Dionysius the Areopagite's works appears in Geerard (2003, nos. 6600–35, 269–77) [Hereafter CPG with numbers].
5. For Andrew of Crete's extant works, see CPG 8170–8228.
6. The same question could be applied to Dionysius, who refers only rarely—and usually obliquely—to man-made images in his treatises; see, for example, *EH* III.iii.2:428C, where he refers to the images that adorn the doors on the *templon* screen that divides the nave from the sanctuary in churches, and *EH* I.i.2:373B; 65, 14–15, Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 197), where he states that 'it is by way of the perceptible images that we are uplifted as far as we can be to the contemplation of what is divine'.

7. Cunningham (2014).
8. There is a huge amount of secondary literature on the iconoclastic controversy. See, for example, Bryer and Herrin (1977), Barber (2002), and Brubaker and Haldon (2011).
9. For homilies, along with more narrative texts, which were intended for the feast that commemorated the restoration of icons in 843, see *Novum auctarium. Bibliothecae hagiographicae graecae*, Halkin (ed.) (1984, 324–5).
10. This author's identification with Niketas 'Magister', a patrician and questor who lived in the late ninth and early tenth century, is no longer accepted; see Auzépy (1995a, 2).
11. Niketas, *Vita Andreae Cretensis* (BHG 113), in *Analecta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias*, Papadopoulos-Kerameus (ed.) (1891–1898, repr. 1963, 169–79). In fact three other Lives of the saint (BHG 114, 114a, and 114b) also survive, all of which are dependent on that of Niketas. For discussion of the Lives, as well as of Niketas and his possible dates, see Vailhé (1901–1902, 178–80), Detorakis (1970, 160–6), and Auzépy (1995a, 2).
12. Niketas, *Vita Andreae Cretensis* 2, in *Analecta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias*, Papadopoulos-Kerameus (ed.), (1891–1898, repr. 1963, 170).
13. Vailhé (1901–1902, 381).
14. See Janin (1964, 349; 1969, 554). For information on such charitable institutions and their officials, see Constantelos (1968, 222–56) and Miller (2003, 176–208).
15. This event is recorded in Theophanes' *Chronicle*, De Boor (ed.) (1883, 382) and Mango and Scott (trans.) (1997, 532).
16. For discussion of the event and of the verses, see Vailhé (1901–1902, 382–4). Although published in PG 97:1437–1444, the verses are re-edited and analysed in Heisenberg (1901). The key Greek word that indicates repentance, or a change of heart, for Heisenberg is 'metebale' (lit. 'turned' or 'changed'); see PG 97:1437C.
17. Kazhdan cites a passage in Andrew's homily on the Transfiguration (CPG 8176, PG 97:944A–B) where Andrew asks 'how one should treat a man "feeble in faith" and having a childish mind; should he be ignored? Not at all, is the answer – we must call him back to the "desired health"'; see Kazhdan (1999, 39).
18. Niketas, *Vita Andreae Cretensis* 8, in *Analecta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias*, Papadopoulos-Kerameus (ed.) (1891–1898, repr. 1963, 177).
19. Vailhé (1901–1902, 386) and Bourbou (2010, 15).
20. Niketas, *Vita Andreae Cretensis* 7, in *Analecta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias*, Papadopoulos-Kerameus (ed.) (1891–1898, repr. 1963, 176).
21. Niketas, *Vita Andreae Cretensis* 9, in *Analecta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias*, Papadopoulos-Kerameus (ed.) (1891–1898, repr. 1963, 177–8).

22. Auzépy (1995a, 4) citing a *menologion* edited by Latyšev: see *Menologii anonymi byzantini saeculi X*, Latyšev (ed.), II, 137, and a canon for 4 July composed by Theophanes Graptos: see *Menaion tou olou eniantou*, July, 1901, 29–33 (see especially Ode Six: ...τῶν σεπτῶν εἰκόνων γὰρ ἐτράνωσας παναληθῶς, Τερομύστα, προσκύνησιν.)
23. CPG 8193; PG 97:1301–1304.
24. Andrew of Crete, *On Human Life and on the Dead*; CPG 8192; PG 97:1296B–C. I have argued elsewhere that this is a topos which appears regularly in texts concerning the burial of the dead, including the funeral rite itself; thus I doubt that it has topical importance in this homily. See Cunningham (forthcoming).
25. Niketas, *Vita Andreae Cretensis* 10, in *Analecta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias*, Papadopoulos-Kerameus (ed.) (1891–1898, repr. 1963, 178–9).
26. Andrew of Crete, *The Great Canon*, PG 97:1329–1385; *Triodion Katanyktikon* (1983, 295–313); also (in abbreviated form) in *Anthologia graeca carminum christianorum*, Christ and Paranikas (eds.) (1871, 147–61).
27. See the list of hymns in ‘Hymnographi byzantini quorum nomina in literas digessit notulisque adornavit’, Emereau (ed.) (1922, 267–71); cf. CPG 8219.
28. On the absence of the second ode in the works of some hymnographers, such as John of Damascus and Kosmas of Maiouma, in contrast to that of hymnographers including Andrew of Crete and Germanus of Constantinople, and on the presence or absence of *theotokia* in early canons, see Jeffery (1991, 58); S. Frøyshov, ‘Rite of Jerusalem’, in *The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology*, available on Academia.edu. I am grateful to the author for sharing a copy of the article with me when we were both Fellows at Dumbarton Oaks Research Library during the academic year, 2015–2016.
29. Eighteen homilies were first published in *SS patrum Amphiloicii Iconiensis, Methodii Patarensis et Andreae Cretensis opera omnia*, Combefis (ed.) (1644); two more (*On the Nativity of the Theotokos* IV and *On the Beheading of John the Baptist*) in *Auctarium novum I, Asterii Amaseae episcopi aliorumque plurium... orationes et homiliae*, Combefis (ed.) (1648). It should be noted, however, that Andrew’s homilies are transmitted in numerous manuscripts that are scattered throughout European and Near Eastern libraries. For a nearly complete list, see Eyre (1966).
30. Ehrhard (1937–1952).
31. Andrew of Crete, *Homily on the Dormition* II; CPG 8181; PG 97:1045–1072. On Daley’s renumbering of this homily, see above note 1. I shall adhere to Daley’s ordering of the three homilies on the Dormition throughout this chapter.

32. Andrew of Crete, *Homily on the Dormition II*, PG 97:1060B; trans. *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 126).
33. Andrew of Crete, *Homily on the Dormition II*, PG 97:1060–1061; *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 127).
34. Ibid.:1061B; Daley (trans.) (1998, 127).
35. DN III.2:681D; 141; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 70).
36. Andreopoulos (2016, 81–6). Andreopoulos states that, following Dionysios's first interpreter John of Scythopolis, subsequent tradition accepted this as a reference to the death and burial of Mary. However, he follows Jugie (1944) in associating the passage rather with the Eucharistic body of Christ. On this topic see Dell'Acqua's essay in this volume.
37. See, for example, John of Scythopolis's commentary on this passage: *Scholia on DN 236*, 8, PG 4:236C, 1–3; Suchla (ed.) (2011, 202–3): Ζωαρχικὸν καὶ θεοδόχον σῶμα ἵσως τὸ τῆς θεοτόκου λέγει τότε κοιμηθείσης. For further commentary on John's interpretation, see Perczel (2009, 28–9) and Mainoldi (2018, 257ff.).
38. For further background on the ways in which 'phantasia' or mental imagery was understood by ancient and medieval writers, see Sheppard (2014).
39. See the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, above, note 1.
40. Andrew of Crete, *Homily on the Dormition I*, PG 97:1076C; *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 106): Εἶη δὲ καὶ ἡμᾶς τοὺς ὅσοι τῇ παρουσίᾳ λαμπροφωρίᾳ περιελάμφημεν, τῆς ὑπερφανοῦς ἐκείνης φωτοφανείας ἀξιοθέντας, καθαρῶς ἰδεῖν· ἢ μετρίως γοῦν δέξασθαι τὴν ἀκτίνα τῆς μυστικῆς ἐποπτείας, καὶ ταῦτα μυηθῆναι σαφῶς, εἰ καὶ μὴ τὰ κατ' ἐκείνον τὸν ὑπεράφραστον βίον· ἄγνωστα γάρ (...).
41. DN I.3:589A–B; 111, 4–7; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 50–51); cf. CH I.1–2:120B–121C; 7–9.
42. CH I.2:121A; 7, 9–11; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 145).
43. See also the discussion of this text in Cunningham (2014, 55–6).
44. Andrew of Crete, *Homily on the Transfiguration*, CPG 8176, PG 97:932B–C; *Light on the Mountain*, Daley (trans.) (2013, 181).
45. See Cunningham (2016, 193–5).
46. Andrew of Crete, *Homily on the Transfiguration*, PG 97:936C–D; *Light on the Mountain*, Daley (trans.) (2013, 184).
47. Andrew of Crete, *Homily on the Transfiguration*, PG 97:933A; (with adjustments) in *Light on the Mountain*, Daley (trans.) (2013, 182).
48. Andrew of Crete, *Homily on the Transfiguration*, PG 97:933C–936A; (with adjustments) in *Light on the Mountain*, Daley (trans.) (2013, 182).
49. Ibid.:936A; Daley (trans.) (2013, 183).
50. Ibid.:936B; Daley (trans.) (2013, 183, n. 11).

51. It is interesting to compare Andrew's concept of the various kinds of 'image' through which God reveals himself in the created world with that of John of Damascus, as set out in his third *Treatise on the Divine Images*; see *On the Divine Images* III.18, Kotter (ed.) (1975, 126–30) and Louth (trans.) (2003, 9–100). In general, Andrew is less systematic with regard to this subject; however, he sees God's imprint everywhere in both natural and man-made aspects of creation.
52. Andrew of Crete, *Homily on Palm Sunday*, CPG 8178; PG 97:996B (for this homily, all translations are my own).
53. Andrew of Crete, *Homily on Palm Sunday*, PG 97:997A.
54. Andrew of Crete, *Homily on Palm Sunday*, PG 97:1008B: Λαβὲ σεαυτῷ νοητὴν εἰκόνα, τὴν ἐν καρδίᾳ τυπουμένην μυστικῶς θεωρίαν, καὶ ἀναζωγράφει μοι τῶν τότε πραγμάτων ἀνατύπωσιν. Ἦγοῦ συμπαρῆναι Χριστῷ, τὴν ἐπὶ Βηθανίαν τριβὸν ὁδεύοντι. Συναφῆται τῷ δήμῳ τῶν μαθητῶν.
55. Andrew of Crete, *Homily on Palm Sunday*, PG 97:1009B: Ποίησον τὴν καρδίαν σου ἀνώγειον ἐστρωμένον, ἵνα ὑποδέξῃ Χριστὸν παρὰ σοὶ τὸ δεῖπνον ἐκεῖνον φαγεῖν. οὐ τὸ ἐπὶ Λαζάρου, ἀλλὰ τὸ μυστικόν, καὶ τοῦ νοητοῦ θυήματος ἐκτυποῦν τὴν εἰκόνα.
56. Gero (1975) and Barber (2002, 79–80).
57. For recent discussion of *The Great Canon*, see Krueger (2014, 130–63).
58. Andrew of Crete, *The Great Canon*, Ode Two, PG 97:1337C; *The Lenten Triodion*, Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware (trans.) (1978, 382).
59. Andrew of Crete, *The Great Canon*, Ode Four, PG 97:1352C.
60. Andrew of Crete, *The Great Canon*, Ode Seven, PG 97:1372C: Ἐπίστρεψον· μετανόησον, ἀνακάλυσσον τὰ κεκρυμμένα...
61. Many of these hymns are published in PG 97:1385–1437; see also *Anthologia graeca carminum christianorum*, Christ and Paranikas (eds.) (1871, 96–8, 147–61).
62. See the *Menaion*, *Triodion*, and *Pentekostarion* for the Orthodox liturgical year (both fixed and movable). I use the term 'Orthodox' (in upper case) to denote the various Chalcedonian Churches that remain under the jurisdiction of Eastern patriarchates or exist as autocephalic sees.
63. Andrew of Crete, *Canon on the Nativity of the Virgin Mary*, PG 97:1321C.
64. It is interesting to compare Andrew's understanding of conceptual images with John of Damascus's fourth category of image, which exists in 'shapes, forms and figures' in scripture that 'convey a faint conception of God and the angels by depicting in bodily form what is invisible and bodiless'. See John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images* III.18, Kotter (ed.) (1975, 128) and Louth (trans.) (2003, 98). On 'visual images', see further Dell'Acqua (forthcoming).

65. Auzépy (1995a).
66. Andrew of Crete, *On the Veneration of Holy Images*, CPG 8193, PG 97:1301–1304.
67. Kazhdan (1999, 39–40).
68. For further, insightful, discussion not only of Andrew, but also Germanus and John of Damascus, in this regard, see Dell’Acqua (forthcoming).
69. There are of course exceptions to this rule. See, for example, Theodore Syncellus’s homily on the siege of the Avars in 626 and Photios’s homilies on the deliverance of Constantinople from the Rus: CPG 7936, *Analecta Avarica*, Sternbach (ed.) (1900); Photius of Constantinople, *Homilies*, Mango (trans.) (1958, 82–110).
70. For further discussion of both kinds of icon, see Brubaker and Haldon (2011, 32–8) and Pentcheva (2006, 43–52).
71. Auzépy (1995a, 5–11); much of this evidence is also cited in Vaillhé (1901–1902, 385–7).
72. Andrew of Crete, *On the Circumcision of the Lord and on St Basil*, PG 97:929D–932A: Ὁ τὰς δύο θελήσεις ὁμοίως καὶ ἐνεργείας φέρων, ὁ κάντεῦθεν ληπτὸς καὶ ἀπερίληπτος, γραπτὸς καὶ ἀπερίγραπτος· τύποις καὶ εἰκονίσμασιν ἡμῖν προγραφόμενος, καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς, ὡς διὰ μέσου σαρκὸς καὶ πνεύματος, προσκυνούμενος. Τοῖς οἰκείοις θεολόγοις καὶ πᾶσιν ἁγίοις ἐκτυπούμενος. Κοινωνῶν ἡμῖν ἐφ’ ἅπασιν ὁμοίως· καὶ γὰρ τῇ ἐντεῦθεν προσκυνήσει τῷ ἀρχετύπῳ ἡ δόξα προσάγεται, ὡς παρὰ σοί, θειότατε πάτερ Βασίλειε, δεδιδάγμεθα γράφοντι· “ἡ γὰρ τιμὴ τῆς εἰκόνης ἐπὶ τὸ πρωτότυπον διαβαίνει”. Οὕτω δὲ ὀρθοδοξοῦντες, ἔθνων φόβον ἀποδράσοιμεν, καὶ νῆσοι λύτρωσιν εἰσδέξονται, αἱ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, διὰ λοιμῶν ἀνδρῶν ἀκοσμίαν ἀφαιρέσεις εἰκόνων παθοῦσαι, ὑπὸ Ἀγαρηνῶν συγκινδυνούσασαι.
73. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 18.45, Pruche (ed.) (1968, 406–8); cf. Barber (2002, 74–5).
74. Vaillhé (1901–1902, 387), Auzépy (1995a, 6), and Kazhdan (1999, 39).
75. Andrew of Crete, *Homily on the Dormition* II, PG 97:1056D–1057A; *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998 [with adjustments], 124).
76. Webb (2009, esp. 87–106) and Plett (2012).
77. Andrew of Crete, *On the Veneration of Holy Images*, CPG 8193, PG 97:1301–1304. A few recent citations of the treatise include Tsironis (2000, 36) and Pentcheva (2006, 124–5).
78. Cod. Paris gr. 1630, fols. 123v–124v. The text was originally edited in *Anecdota graeca e codicibus regiis*, Boissonade (ed.) (1832, 471–3).
79. For a translation and further discussion of this passage, see Pentcheva (2006, 124).

80. Stephen the Deacon, *The Life of St Stephen the Younger*, Auzépy (ed.) (1997, 99–100); *The Letter of the Three Patriarchs to Emperor Theophilos and Related Texts*, Munitiz et al. (eds.) (1997, 32–9).
81. In adopting this position, I follow Tomadakis (1965, 192), Detorakis (1970, 176), and Kazhdan (1999, 39), but diverge from Auzépy (1995a, 7), Tsironis (2000, 36), and Pentcheva (2006, 124–5).
82. If so, he would concur with John of Damascus, who presents a hierarchical list of the different forms of image in his third treatise in defence of icons. See John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images* III.18, Kotter (ed.) (1975, 126–30) and Louth (trans.) (2003, 96–100).
83. See above note 75.
84. Andrew of Crete wrote panegyric sermons on St Titus, St George, St Nicholas, St Patapios, and the martyrs of Crete. For editions, see CPG 8185–90, 8194–5. A text on the miracles of St Therapon is also ascribed to Andrew; see CPG 8196: for discussion, see Auzépy (1995a, 9) and Haldon (2007, esp. 267–8). Although Auzépy accepts Andrew of Crete’s authorship of this work, Haldon lists the problems associated with this attribution.
85. Ševčenko (1977) and Auzépy (1995b).
86. Dagron (1992).
87. See, for example, the canon of Theophanes Graptos, cited above note 22.
88. On saints, see above note 84; on the cross, see Andrew’s two homilies on the Exaltation of the Cross (CPG nos. 8179–80), PG 97:1017–1045.

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Pseudo-Dionysius and the Dormition of the Virgin *Platytéra* ('Wider Than the Heavens')

Francesca Dell'Acqua

In this chapter, I retrace the origins of the connections between the pseudo-apostolic author Dionysius and the supernatural event of the Assumption, through its liturgical commemoration, homilies, and visual depictions between the sixth and the eighth centuries. The majority of commentators believes a passage from the treatise on the *Divine Names* of Dionysius the Areopagite to be the earliest authoritative account of Mary's Dormition.¹ I will argue that this passage shaped the way the *transitus* or transition of the Mother of God to the afterlife was imagined and represented in words and pictures in medieval Byzantium and the West. Eighth-century homilists, who for the first time explicitly quote Dionysius among their sources for the Dormition, connect Mary's Assumption into heaven to the belief that her womb contained the uncontainable God. The image of the Virgin *Platytéra* (Πλατυτέρα

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τῶν οὐρανῶν, 'wider than the heavens'), whose earliest known figural developments coincide in dating with the *Corpus Dionysiacum* in the sixth century, seems also to be alluded to by Dionysius in *On the Divine Names*. In particular, I shall take into account how a figural illustration of the *Platyτέρα* was conceived early in the ninth century in a central Italian monastery against the background of an articulated reasoning, imbued with Pseudo-Dionysian thinking and wording, about Mary as the vessel of the Incarnation.

That the figure of Dionysius came to be indelibly connected in the medieval imagination to the Dormition of Mary is attested by a late medieval mural painting in the prominent church of S. Francesco in Assisi, as well as by the most influential hagiographical collection of the late medieval West, the *Legenda Aurea*.

MARY'S *TRANSITUS* AND DIONYSIUS

The transition of Mary to heaven is not mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures. Only apocryphal sources in early eastern Christendom dealt with it, and these differ among themselves in the details.² Nonetheless, by the early fifth century, if not earlier, a feast for commemorating Mary's memory was celebrated in Palestine and in the rest of the Byzantine Empire, although on various dates. An Armenian lectionary dated to the first half of the fifth century records that a feast dedicated to the glorification of Mary was celebrated on August 15 at the church of the Kathisma in Palestine.³ This church was established shortly after the Council of Chalcedon (451) halfway between Jerusalem and Bethlehem where, according to the *Protoevangelium of James*, Mary had rested before giving birth to Christ.⁴ The celebration of Mary's *transitus* to the afterlife became the climax of the Marian liturgical calendar in Palestine and Byzantium. This calendar was systematised under Emperor Justinian (527–65), although it was his successor, Emperor Maurice (582–602), who fixed the date of Mary's Dormition and Assumption on August 15 for the whole empire.⁵ Georgian liturgical texts reflecting the development of Marian feasts in Palestine attest that most likely from the sixth century on there was increasing emphasis on Mary's funeral and *transitus* to heaven during her commemoration. In relation to this, her tomb in the garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem, where a church had been built in the late sixth century, became the focus of her cult and the second stop in a stationary liturgy that also involved the *Nea Ecclesia* (New

Church) of the *Theotokos* built earlier by Justinian in Jerusalem. During the seventh century, the Assumption came to be celebrated as part of a five-day festival involving the major Marian shrines in Jerusalem and its environs.⁶

Given this background, let us now consider whether Dionysius the Areopagite had any influence on the development of these Marian celebrations. One clue can be found in the information that, under Justinian, the feast of Dionysius was established on October 3 and the feast of his master and first bishop of Athens, Hierotheus, the day after. October 3 falls fifty days after the feast of the Dormition/Assumption, and fifty days before the feast celebrating Mary's Entrance into the Temple, on November 21. Thus some scholars have argued that the date chosen for the feast of Dionysius was intended to emphasise his role in support of the cult of Mary.⁷ Although a dossier of sources about Dionysius endorsing the cult of Mary still needs to be produced, in a plethora of apocryphal sources on Mary's transition to the afterlife, the purported immediate disciple of the apostles, Dionysius the Areopagite, would indeed be an authoritative reference. In a rather brief and cryptic passage of his treatise, *On the Divine Names*, Dionysius writes:

As you know, we and he [Hierotheus] and many of our holy brothers met together for a vision of that mortal body, that source of life, which bore God. James, the brother of God, was there. So too was Peter, that summit, that chief of all those who speak of God. After the vision, all these hierarchs chose, each as he was able, to praise the omnipotent goodness of that divine frailty. ... I say nothing of those mysterious experiences. You know them well, and they cannot be explained to the multitude.⁸

I wish to direct attention here to the image of the dead Mother of God whose 'mortal body, that source of life, which bore God' (τοῦ ζωαρχικοῦ καὶ θεοδόχου σώματος), is surrounded by a sombre and dignified assembly of apostles. This sort of tableau vivant inevitably recalls Palestinian apocryphal accounts of Mary's funeral (although they were much more florid in their detail).⁹ But with Dionysius, the event finally found a (supposedly) apostolic reference. Moreover, what made his succinct description palatable to Christian authors and preachers was that, unlike other early texts, it had a solid theological and philosophical grounding.¹⁰ Although some modern scholars have interpreted the same passage as a reference to the Eucharistic body,¹¹ already one of the earliest

commentators on Dionysius' writings, John of Scythopolis (c.537–43), saw it as a reference to the *transitus* of the Virgin.¹² With this in mind, the choice (possibly) made by the Byzantine (Chalcedonian) Church to add the feast of Dionysius and his master as a sort of theological–historical buttress between two important feasts of the Virgin appears to reinforce the view that Dionysius, an apostolic witness to her funeral, was deemed by the Church to be pivotal in supporting the official commemoration of her *transitus*.

PICTURING HER FUNERAL IN WORDS AND IMAGES (SIXTH–EIGHTH CENTURIES)

Although an abundance of apocryphal texts and tales about Mary's *transitus* circulated in the ancient eastern Christian *oecumene*,¹³ its earliest extant depiction dates to the sixth century. It is found on a sixth-century souvenir, a clay token from the old site of Scythopolis (today Bet She'an, Israel)¹⁴ (Fig. 8.1). This is an *eulogia*, that is, a blessing or blessed object, 6 cm in diameter, on which the event of Mary's funeral is condensed into a representation of her lying on a funeral couch surrounded by the apostles. Excavations undertaken at the Kathisma church have revealed a ceramic pipe leading water to the holy rock where Mary rested at the centre of the former octagonal building. It has been assumed that the water, sanctified by contact with her seat, was used to model clay into *eulogiai* destined for pilgrims.¹⁵ *Eulogiai* were produced between the fifth and the early seventh centuries, until the Umayyad conquest of the region, and again after the Byzantine reoccupation of Antioch in the late tenth century.¹⁶ It is tempting to see the clay token from Scythopolis as a pilgrimage souvenir acquired at one of the cult places in Palestine where Mary's Dormition was celebrated, such as the Kathisma church or her tomb at the Gethsemane—especially since Scythopolis, the capital city of Galilee, was on the inland route connecting Jerusalem to Antaradus and Akko (Acre), the main ports of the Levant. This was the route followed, for example, by the anonymous Piacenza pilgrim in c.570, who visited both the basilica of Saint Mary in the valley of Gethsemane and the nearby 'place at which she was taken up from this life'.¹⁷

The sixth-century *eulogia* from Scythopolis reflects what evidently was the most commonly perceived vision of Mary's *transitus*, with the apostles surrounding her bier. It corresponds to the image in words transmitted by Dionysius. The approximate chronological coincidence in the sixth



Fig. 8.1 *Eulogion*, clay, 6 cm diam., from Scythopolis (now Bet She'an), sixth century, Israel Antiquities Authority (*Photo credit* from Shoemaker 2002, fig. 8)

century between the clay token and the passage of Dionysius should be noted. It should also be combined with the above-mentioned hypothesis that, during the sixth century, the devotion and public cult of the Virgin Mary—including the idea of her supernatural transition to heaven—were promoted at an official level. This contrasts with the view, advanced especially in recent studies, that the official cult of Mary the Mother of God became more important only after Byzantine Iconoclasm (post 843).¹⁸ However, liturgical texts dating from between the late seventh and the

eight centuries leave no doubt about the fact that Mary's transition to heaven was celebrated in the eastern Christian *oecumene*.

After the clay token of Scythopolis, the Dormition of Mary can be found depicted in Cappadocian mural paintings dated between the pre-iconoclastic period and the early tenth century, so the iconographic evidence cannot be adduced as decisive.¹⁹ All the same, mental and textual images of Mary's transition to the afterlife were indeed developed in homilies for the feast of the Dormition composed between the late seventh and the early eighth centuries. Some among them bear specific references to Dionysius the Areopagite as an authoritative source. (Indeed, the prominent set of writings known as the *Corpus Dionysiacum* had not lost its importance in the eastern theological tradition after the age of Justinian and was used, for example, as an apostolic *auctoritas* in important theological disputes.²⁰) In his set of homilies for the vigil celebrations of the Dormition, Andrew of Crete, bishop of Gortyna on Crete (692/713–30), praises Dionysius as 'the soaring eagle, the one mind most adept at depicting the divine'. Born in Damascus, Andrew became a cleric at the Anastasis Church in Jerusalem. There, he probably frequented holy sites associated with the Virgin Mary and became aware of narratives about her transition to heaven that circulated in written and oral form. Probably already in Palestine, or later in Constantinople, where he was appointed deacon at the cathedral church of Hagia Sophia, he came in contact with the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Andrew explicitly states that he derived from Dionysius the vision of Mary lying on her funeral couch surrounded by the apostles singing hymns in her praise.²¹ In the same homily, speaking of Mary's tomb at Gethsemane, Andrew says that, 'before the gaze of those who look on holy things with faith, there stand here clear images [εἰκόνες], eloquent representation of my [Mary's] passing', and then he speaks of her tomb 'which stands intact even today'.²² While it is possible that Andrew was pointing to real icons and her very burial place in order to render the account of Mary's *transitus* more vivid to the mind, his use of the plural for images (εἰκόνες) may suggest that he was appealing to his audience's visual imagination of the Dormition. To the visual imagining of the Dormition, Dionysius had offered an essential, 'authentic' picture. The audience was thus invited to participate, mystically, in the mystery through an 'imaginative and celebratory process', as noted by Brian Daley.²³ However, Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople (715–30) certainly speaks of real

figural depictions of Mary (although not necessarily of her Dormition) in his first homily on the Dormition, when he says: ‘the material colors of your icons, O Mother of God, dazzle us with the representation of your gifts’.²⁴ But he does not mention Dionysius.

John of Damascus, monk at the Great Lavra of St Sabas, in his second homily on the Dormition, speaks of envisioning Mary’s *transitus* and of Dionysius. It is the mind’s pictures nourished by widespread beliefs and orally transmitted tales, even in the context of his own family, to which John of Damascus refers when begins ‘to sketch out in least a few scenes and images the marvels that came to pass at the death of this holy woman, the Mother of God, as we have learned them in summary from ancient times, as we say, at our mother’s knees’.²⁵ He then proceeds to reimagine Mary’s funeral, where the ‘eye-witnesses’ were present, probably alluding also to Dionysius.²⁶ He admits to ruminating on the Dormition when he opens his third and final homily for the feast’s night vigil by saying: ‘It is the way of those who are consumed with love for something to have it always on their tongue, to have an image of it in their mind night and day’.²⁷ In post-iconoclastic Byzantium, Dionysius’ passage on the funeral was appended to John’s second homily, along with an excerpt from the anonymous *Historia Euthymiaca* recalling the arrival of Mary’s contact relics in Constantinople.²⁸ In the same post-iconoclastic period Dionysius became the object of devotion.²⁹ He was also portrayed among patriarchs and saints in the mosaics of Hagia Sophia—appropriately so in the church dedicated to the Holy Wisdom.³⁰

THE MYSTERIES OF HER BODY

The accounts of Mary’s funeral, invested with the authority of Dionysius and, through him, incorporated and discussed in homilies, helped shape eastern Christian mental and material representations of the Dormition. Indeed, in Byzantium and Palestine, the focus was and would remain on the moment in which Mary was lying on her deathbed surrounded by her spiritual sons—in contrast to the West, where the accent was predominantly, although not exclusively, on her bodily Assumption into heaven.³¹

Despite the focus being on Mary’s funeral, as described by the (supposed) eye-witness Dionysius, eastern authors did not avoid the question of the destiny of her body after death. In one of the earliest known Greek homilies on the Dormition, early in the seventh century,

Theoteknos, the bishop of Livias, a town at the foot of Mount Nebo, delivered a homily in which he uses the term 'assumption' (ἀνάληψις) to describe the 'wonderful mystery ... strange miracle' of Mary's ascent into heaven in her soul *and* body.³² His contemporary, Archbishop John of Thessalonica, also takes into account the question of the soul and body of Mary in his homily for the Dormition.³³ When Christ arrived at his mother's deathbed to take her soul, which was imagined in the shape of a human body and that he wrapped in swaddling bands, the body of Mary pleaded with Christ not to forget it, since it too was his creature (πλάσμα). Christ answered that, due to its preciousness and purity, he would not leave behind her body.³⁴

Later, the most influential homilists on the Dormition, Andrew of Crete, Germanus of Constantinople, and John of Damascus, all insisted that nothing much was actually known about Mary's *transitus* to the afterlife: since it had been kept mysterious by God, the event needed to be accepted as a mystery by the faithful.³⁵ These authors all adopted the same strategy when celebrating Mary's Dormition and Assumption: they remained vague about the details of these events while praising her virtuous life and humility in accepting God's will, her extraordinary maternity, and her contribution to the deliverance of humankind.³⁶ In this light, Mary's mysterious bodily Assumption was presented as the necessary consequence of her role in the mysterious Incarnation, through which her body contained and gave birth to God. In his first homily on the Dormition, John of Damascus says that Mary's soul was taken up by her Son and that her body did not suffer decay.³⁷ In the second homily, he openly says that her body was lifted up into heaven because it was fitting that since her body had been left undefiled by childbirth, it should be preserved from corruption.³⁸ He also has Mary say to Christ: 'Receive the soul that is so dear to you, which you have preserved blameless. Yours is my body too; I do not give it to the earth! Keep it safe, since you were pleased to dwell in it ... Bring me close to you'.³⁹ Echoing John of Thessalonica, Germanus of Constantinople creates a fictional dialogue between Christ and Mary, in which the Son promises to his mother not to leave her alone for long in the Gethsemane tomb, but to take her to dwell with him in Heaven—with 'her' implying both her body and her soul.⁴⁰

In sum, by combining a pious belief in Mary's Assumption into heaven with the evocative language of poetry and the authority of Dionysius, Greek homilists of the late seventh and the early eighth

centuries forged a lucid argumentation that overcame somewhat the ineffability of the two inexplicable mysteries of the Incarnation and the Assumption. The authority they gained in the matter is reflected, for example, in the influence they exercised on the earliest Latin homiletic tradition on the subject in the mid-eighth century,⁴¹ by their translation into Latin in the late ninth,⁴² and subsequently in the late medieval *Legenda Aurea* composed in c.1260–70 by the Dominican monk Jacobus de Voragine, later archbishop of Genoa. Mary's Assumption, in other words, was seen as the crowning moment of a life-long process which ultimately led to her acquisition in heaven of an incomparable role as the main intercessor for humankind. For now, though, we set aside this latter aspect and, instead, focus on Mary's body, 'which bore God', in the words of Dionysius.

DIONYSIUS AND THE PLATYTÉRA TŌN OURANŌN (‘WIDER THAN HEAVEN’)

The body of Mary—or better her womb as a graphic *pars pro toto*—had been already praised by early Christian authors for having contained the uncontainable, for being ‘wider than heaven’. The apocryphal *Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew*, dated to the third century, has the Apostle Bartholomew asking Mary if she would explain how she ‘carried him who cannot be carried’, or how she ‘bore so much greatness’.⁴³ Later he invokes her by saying ‘O womb wider than the span of heaven! O womb that contained him whom the seven heavens do not contain. ... O womb that became more spacious than the whole creation!’.⁴⁴ Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373), like other eastern Fathers, expressed his wonder and admiration at the fact that the womb of a woman contained God.⁴⁵

The idea that the womb of Mary had contained the uncontainable was made popular through homilies and hymns. For example, in the early decades of the fifth century, in his homilies on the Virgin, Proclus of Constantinople extolled the womb of the Virgin by saying that: ‘the womb of a virgin contained the mystery of the divine dispensation. O womb wider than the heavens!’⁴⁶ In what is maybe his most famous homily, the one delivered in Hagia Sophia and soon after included in the Acts of the Council of Ephesus (431), Proclus addresses the mystery of Mary's womb in these words: ‘Who ever saw, who ever heard, of God dwelling without restriction in a woman's womb? Heaven itself cannot contain him, and yet a womb did not constrict him’.⁴⁷ Also, the

Akathistos, the most famous Marian hymn in the Greek tradition, whose dating is disputed between the fifth and the sixth centuries, praised Mary's womb with the same phrasing: 'Hail container of the uncontainable God', 'Hail, vessel of the wisdom of God'.⁴⁸

Therefore, there is no doubt that the contradictory idea of a human womb 'wider than heaven' was attested in Christian mentality well before the *Corpus Dionysiacum* was written. In the first chapter of his *On the Divine Names*, Dionysius states that God is the one who transcends everything in his greatness, 'and yet he dwells in a light, thin breeze (καὶ ὥς ἐν αὐρᾷ λεπτῇ)'.⁴⁹ In the same treatise, Dionysius adds: 'Greatness and Smallness, Sameness and Difference, Similarity and Dissimilarity, Rest and Motion—these are all the titles applied to the Cause of everything. They are divinely named images [ἀγάλματα] and we should now contemplate them as far as they are revealed to us. God is praised in scripture as "great" and as in greatness and in the "still, small breeze" which reveals the divine smallness'.⁵⁰ I argue that these words—better than others written by previous Christian authors—represent the idea and the figural image of the greatness of God contained in a thin, light breeze/αὐρᾷ which is rendered as a halo that seems to visualise, at the same time, Mary's virginal womb as well as his divine light. Thus, the figural image of Mary holding Christ in a mandorla of light—which some scholars call *Platyτέρα τὸν ouranōn*⁵¹—visualises human smallness and divine splendour combined.

The authority of the Apostle Bartholomew is explicitly recalled by Dionysius to support his assumption that 'the Word of God is vast and minuscule' and 'the Gospel is wide-ranging and yet restricted'.⁵² Although this Dionysian passage is not related to the Virgin Mary, nor specifically to the above-mentioned gospel attributed to Bartholomew which speaks of Mary's womb as 'wider than the span of heaven', it invites the reader to consider that the gospels could not describe things which are beyond human grasp. Among these were the inexplicable Incarnation and the mysterious transition of Mary to the afterlife. All the same, Dionysius manages to encapsulate the rather elusive concept of the Virgin Mary as *Platyτέρα τὸν ouranōn*. As already mentioned, the earliest literary expressions about the Virgin's womb as 'wider than the heavens' can be dated as early as the third century. But Dionysius gave the stamp of apostolic authority and a unique vividness to the image of a virginal womb made wider than heaven by divine intervention,

which undoubtedly was already popular through apocryphal writings, preaching, and liturgical hymns. Averil Cameron has noted that Dionysius ‘posed in the sharpest possible way the central problem of Christian representation’, in his belief that ‘God can only be assessed through images’, since nothing can be said about him.⁵³ The words of Dionysius—‘he dwells in a light, thin aura’—enflesh what can be defined as a ‘textual icon’.⁵⁴ They seem to anticipate the visualisation of the Virgin as *Platyτέρα τὸν ouranōn*, and therefore one wonders if they contributed to the creation of its figural image. The earliest extant figural examples of the Virgin holding Christ Child in a mandorla of light date to the Justinianic period or shortly afterwards. Among the earliest extant examples are a miniature in a Syriac manuscript (Paris, BnF, ms. syr. 341, f. 118r), imperial seals (Emperor Heraclius, c.616–25, Washington, DC, Dumbarton Oaks, BZS.1958.106.528), and mural paintings in the monastic complex of Apollo at Bawit (Chapel XXVIII).⁵⁵ Their appearances vary in the details and this may be a symptom of the fact that the iconography was just developing. Some scholars argued that the Virgin holding her Child in a ‘disc’ in front of her chest was an image related to imperial imagery and propaganda. This position has been contrasted with the idea that the ‘disc’ is a projection of Mary’s womb and is to be related to the Incarnation.⁵⁶ In the post-iconoclastic period, the *Platyτέρα τὸν ouranōn* merged with the type of the *Blachernitissa* that has the Virgin standing in the *orans* position, with open arms, with a disk in front of her chest showing the bust of the Christ Child.⁵⁷ All the same, the fact that depictions of the *Platyτέρα τὸν ouranōn* began to appear at more or less the same time that the *Corpus Dionysiaccum* emerged and started circulating is probably no coincidence. This has not been previously remarked. It remains to be investigated if the fact that the earliest extant examples, which are from the Syriac-Palestinian and Egyptian monastic milieux, are related to the dissemination of the *Corpus Dionysiaccum* or should simply be seen as mirroring a similar way of conceiving and visualising the mystery of the Incarnation.

Dionysius’ statement on God dwelling ‘in a light, thin aura’ could be seen as a consequence of the fifth-century debate over the Incarnation and the natures of Christ which was galvanised by the councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451). Intellectual reasoning on the Incarnation reached a turning point with Dionysius, who, unlike other

theologians, solemnly and openly declared the 'divine mystery of the ineffable Incarnation' to be *incomprehensible* and therefore *inexpressible* through words:

But even that which, among what is spoken of God, is most manifest, namely, the sacred incarnation of Jesus for our sakes, is something which cannot be enclosed in words nor grasped by any mind, not even by the leaders among the front ranks of the angels. That he undertook to be a man is, for us, entirely mysterious.⁵⁸

Around the same time, the figural image of the *Platyτέρα τῶν ouranōn* took shape. It was designed to *suggest* the mystery of the Incarnation, rather than to elucidate it. The *Platyτέρα* seems to add another meaning to the term *Theotokos* or 'God-bearer' (or better, 'the one who gave birth to God'). In fact, while Mary enthroned with Christ on her lap openly displays the *reality* of the Incarnation in an image immediately understandable to all, the *Platyτέρα τῶν ouranōn* with the Virgin holding a mandorla of light that circumscribes the Christ Child on her lap alludes to the *mystery* of the Incarnation of the infinite God in a finite womb, and seems therefore pitched at an intellectually superior audience.

Between the early seventh and the eighth centuries, the 'textual icon' of the *Platyτέρα τῶν ouranōn*, which had evidently become part of the mental repertoire of eastern Christians, was used in Greek homilies on Marian feasts, especially the Dormition, to underpin the belief in her bodily Assumption. Early in the seventh century, in his homily on the Dormition, Theoteknos of Livias wrote that 'she who had become wider than the heavens ... was ... to be taken up to heaven'.⁵⁹ A century later, Andrew of Crete, in a homily on the Annunciation, salutes Mary's womb as 'the spacious place for God who is nowhere contained, but who was contained in you alone'.⁶⁰ Expanding on the image of the *Platyτέρα* seen in earlier Marian homilies and on the parallelism between the exceptional transition to a new life of Christ and Mary, Germanus of Constantinople has recourse to the image of the *Platyτέρα τῶν ouranōn* to justify Mary's bodily Assumption. He has Jesus Christ tell his Mother: 'Entrust your body to me, just as I placed my divinity in your womb'.⁶¹ More explicitly, in one of his homilies on the Dormition, probably delivered in the early decades of the eighth century in the church built above Mary's tomb near Gethsemane,⁶² John of Damascus also has recourse

to the image of the *Platyτέρα tōn ouranōn*, when he rhetorically asks: ‘How could heaven receive one who is called “wider than the heavens”? How could a grave contain the one who contained God?’⁶³ These few instances attest that the idea of the mysterious Incarnation of an infinite God in the womb of a woman became a crucial theological underpinning for the belief that she had been mysteriously assumed into heaven at the end of her life.

TWO WESTERN EXAMPLES OF THE PLATYTÉRA TŌN OURANŌN

These literary images of the *Platyτέρα tōn ouranōn* roughly coincide in date with one of its more spectacular depictions, preserved not in the eastern Mediterranean, but in Rome. This is a large mural (2.80 × 4.35 m) on the upper wall of the narthex of the basilica of S. Sabina in Rome, painted during the office of Pope Constantine (708–15), and only discovered in 2010 (Fig. 8.2).⁶⁴ It shows the Virgin Mary standing under an elegant canopy, holding the Christ Child in an aureole in front of her, flanked by Peter and Paul and by two female saints, possibly the early martyrs Sabina and Seraphia, who introduce to the extreme left and right of the composition two donors with square haloes, each holding books with bejewelled covers. A third donor is represented in *proskynesis* to the right of Mary. As confirmed by an inscription running along its left and top sides, this mural was painted as an ex-voto, commissioned by the archpriest Theodore and the priest George, in the time of Pope Constantine.⁶⁵ Among those depicted, the pope has been identified as the man at the far left wearing an ochre *pallium*, and Theodore, the main donor according to the inscription, as the figure in *proskynesis*. Theodore was twice a candidate for the papacy, but became *archipresbyter* in 687. Theodore and George were two of the four official papal legates who attended the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Second Council of Constantinople) in the name of Pope Agatho between 680–1 to discuss the Monothelite controversy.⁶⁶ Against such a background, this mural has been interpreted as a statement about the two natures, and therefore two wills of Christ, and thus as a kind of manifesto regarding this controversy (Fig. 8.3). The fact that Monothelitism had been revived by Emperor Philippikos Bardanes (711–13) may have spurred the former envoys to the council of 680–1 to commission this painting many



Fig. 8.2 *Platytéra* with donors, angels, and saints, mural painting, 2.80 × 4.35 m, c.708–15, Rome, Basilica of S. Sabina on the Aventine (Photo credit © Manuela Gianandrea)

years after their safe return to Rome as a ‘visual statement’ against Monothelitism while at the same time expressing their gratitude to the Virgin.⁶⁷ The painting also has another function, namely, to convey the hopes of the donors for the future intercession of the *Platytéra tōn ouranōn*. This votive painting has rightly been defined by those who discovered it as a ‘mural icon’.⁶⁸

Besides the specific iconography of the *Platytéra tōn ouranōn*, which is rare in the West before this example,⁶⁹ and the origins of the donors from the Greek-speaking Mediterranean, close cultural relations with the Greek world are also attested by linguistic characteristics of its Latin inscription.⁷⁰ This notwithstanding, the ‘influence’ of Dionysius in this specific instance



Fig. 8.3 *Platytera* with donors, angels, and saints, mural painting, detail, Rome, Basilica of S. Sabina on the Aventine (*Photo credit* © Manuela Gianandrea)

cannot be demonstrated. In fact, although his writings were known and circulated in Rome well before their Carolingian translations (the aforementioned Pope Agatho quotes them in the letter he sent to Emperor Constantine IV on the occasion of the Sixth Council of Constantinople),⁷¹ and the donors of the mural in S. Sabina were learned members of the papal court, we should rather see the question in more general terms. Between the sixth and the eighth centuries, the authority of Dionysius as well as its vision of the world and heavens permeated Christian theology. This was also used to endorse beliefs and mental images about Mary which became part of a shared Mediterranean understanding of her role in the history of salvation and eventually inspired her figural representations.

Another figural representation of the *Platyτέρα τὸν ouranōn* may reveal a connection with Pseudo-Dionysian thought through a consideration of specific ideas and words. The painted programme of the crypt of Santa Maria *in insula* at the monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno (Isernia, central Italy), completed under the Frankish Abbot Epiphanius (824–42), includes an image usually described by art historians as a *Theotokos*. Here, the Virgin wears a crown, as is the typical iconography of the Maria *Regina* attested in Rome since the early sixth century. She holds the aureole projected by her Son while a donor with a square halo is shown at her feet in *proskynesis* (Fig. 8.4). This mural is painted to the right of the *fenestella confessionis*, that is, the window connecting the oratory to the sanctuary above; the image is significantly placed as symmetrical pendant to the Crucifixion on the left side of the *fenestella* and is the last image that the eye of the visitor meets when exiting the oratory, as if inviting the visitor to join the donor in asking for the intercession of the Virgin (Fig. 8.5). Fernanda De' Maffei has rightly described this depiction as an image of the Virgin as *Platyτέρα τὸν ouranōn*.⁷² Besides the example at S. Sabina, the *Platyτέρα* has few parallels in early Medieval Italy. The mural in the Crypt of Epiphanius, therefore, requires an explanation; this can be sought by taking into account the milieu in which it was conceived. The painted programme of the crypt, focused on the importance of the figures of Mary and Christ, was explained in 1904 by Pietro Toesca and later by Hans Belting and other eminent scholars using the writings of the Gallic theologian, Ambrose Autpert (d. 784), who was monk and briefly abbot (777–8) at San Vincenzo.⁷³ This author was of key importance in shaping a new image of Mary, the Mother of God. He is believed by many art historians to have inspired an innovative Marian iconography in medieval art.⁷⁴



Fig. 8.4 *Platyτέρα with donor*, mural painting, early ninth century, Crypt of Abbot Epyphanius (824–42), Monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno (Isernia, central Italy) (Photo credit © Francesca Dell’Acqua)



Fig. 8.5 Crypt of Abbot Epyphanus (824–42), Monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno (Isernia, central Italy) (*Photo credit* © Francesca Dell’Acqua)

Regarding the Mother of God, Autpert offers a lucid image of the concept of a human small womb containing and comprehending the uncontainable God in his homily on the feast of the Purification of Mary and of the Presentation of the Christ Child in the Temple, which the earliest manuscripts designate with Greek title of *hypapante* (that is, the ‘meeting’ between the Holy Family and the elder Symeon and the prophetess Anna in the Temple). Autpert writes that the divinity of the Child cannot be ‘comprehended’ by the world, using the Latin expression ‘capit’ which has a physical as well as conceptual implications.⁷⁵ In fact, only Mary recognised the divine immensity in her ‘paruissimum’ or ‘tantillum infantem’, the ‘smallest Child’, to whom she gave life, and whom she breast-fed and cuddled.⁷⁶ In the same homily, Autpert returns several times to the paradoxical nature of the Incarnate God, adding that, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, with eyes opened by faith, and with the practice of good deeds, it will be possible to see him ‘not small in His flesh, but immense in His divinity’.⁷⁷ In sum, the infant Christ, the Incarnate God presented in the Temple, is an ‘ineffable miracle’,⁷⁸ a wording that undoubtedly recalls the language of negative theology, as noted by Luigi Gambero.⁷⁹ In line with Dionysius and the eastern tradition of apophatic theology, Autpert is aware that the human mind can neither comprehend rationally nor describe logically the essence of God. Time and again in his writings, he characterises God as ungraspable, ineffable, incomprehensible, inaccessible, the invisible executor of visible and invisible things.⁸⁰ He uses, among other adjectives, also ‘ineffabilis’⁸¹—an adjective which, after Augustine of Hippo, in early medieval western exegesis is only found in Autpert.⁸² These and other elements show that Autpert was acquainted, either directly or indirectly, with the Greek patristic tradition, including Dionysius.⁸³ Pervaded by a visual vividness and verbal apophaticism of likely Dionysian origin, Autpert’s image of the Virgin bringing her Child to the Temple, looking at him in awe while wondering about his divine and human nature, small albeit immense, seems to offer a plausible background for how the depiction of the Virgin *Platytéra tōn ouranōn* came to be painted in the Crypt of Ephyphanius few decades later.

Before leaving the image of the *Platytéra tōn ouranōn*, which remained unusual in the West, it should be noted that it was ingeniously



Fig. 8.6 *Maiestas Domini* with Mary in an *imago clipeata*, and *transitus Mariae*, Pericopes of Henry II (1002–12), illuminated manuscript on parchment, from the Monastery of Reichenau, Munich, Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 4452, fol. 161v (Photo credit © Bayerische Staatsbibliothek)

adapted to express visually the celestial Assumption of the Virgin in the manuscript of the Pericopes of Henry II (1002–12), illuminated at the monastery of Reichenau. Encircled in a mandorla, Christ appears enthroned in the sky while blessing with his right hand and holding a book in his left (Munich, Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 4452, fol. 161v) (Fig. 8.6). This iconography, usually identified as a *Maiestas Domini*, is here inventively combined with Mary's *transitus* by placing the *clipeus* with her soul in front of Christ's knees.⁸⁴ In this case, the Mother and Son relationship as visualised in the iconography of the *Platyτέρα* is reversed: the enthroned Son holds a *clipeus* containing an image of his Mother.

LATE MEDIEVAL THINKING OF MARY'S *TRANSITUS*

While the iconography of the *Platyτέρα tōn ouranōn* had no further developments in western art—and therefore its connection with Dionysius was not cultivated—Dionysius' authority for the transition of Mary to the afterlife, as first and foremost among the Greek authorities because of his apostolic status, seems to have been long upheld. So, in the late thirteenth century, in Assisi, Dionysius was portrayed among those who witnessed Mary's passing. The sequence of Mary's Assumption into heaven occupies four scenes painted in the lowest register in the choir of the upper church of S. Francesco, the shrine of Saint Francis.⁸⁵ It is telling that these scenes were placed to either side of the papal throne, as if manifesting the endorsement by the pope of the idea of her *transitus* (though Mary's bodily Assumption was declared dogma only in 1950). The artist responsible for these scenes was the acclaimed Florentine painter Cimabue, called to Assisi either in the late 1270s, or under the Franciscan Pope Nicholas II between 1288–1292.⁸⁶ It has been proposed that a sermon written by Bonaventura of Bagnoregio, the authoritative minister general of the order of Friars Minor, drawing on the Mariology of Bernard of Clairvaux as well as on the rich and almost 'cinematic' narrative presented shortly before in the *Legenda Aurea*, might have fuelled the imagination of those who conceived the cycle in Mary's *transitus* in Assisi.⁸⁷ In the first scene, on the left wall of the choir, the apostles surrounding Mary at her death-bed are thirteen: the one standing on the right, pointing at Mary and holding a scroll has been identified as either Saint Paul or Dionysius the Areopagite (Figs. 8.7 and 8.8).⁸⁸ I am inclined to think Dionysius



Fig. 8.7 Dormition of Mary witnessed by thirteen apostles, mural painting, 1270s or 1288–92, Assisi, Basilica di S. Francesco, choir (*Photo credit* © Kunsthistorisches Institut Florenz)



Fig. 8.8 Dormition of Mary witnessed by thirteen apostles, mural painting, detail with Dionysius the Areopagite, Assisi, Basilica di S. Francesco, choir (*Photo credit* © Kunsthistorisches Institut Florenz)

is a better guess: he was the only apostolic author to have left a written source on her funeral. The following scene, adjacent to the papal throne, shows the arrival of Jesus to take his mother's soul. To the other side of the throne, a congregation of apostles, patriarchs, martyrs, and confessors are the privileged witnesses to the emotional reunion of Christ and Mary, depicted within a mandorla above an empty tomb, revealing her bodily Assumption through her absence. The cycle is concluded by the final glorification of Mary, seated on a large throne with her Son, Bridegroom, and King, surrounded by a celestial hierarchy of angels, probably inspired by Dionysius' vision of heaven. The unprecedented, intimate embrace they share—with her resting her head on his shoulder while they hold hands—seals and reveals their mystical marriage, which would grant salvation to humankind (Song of Songs; cf. John, 3, 28–9).⁸⁹ If the identification of the figure as Dionysius is correct, this mural shows that, by the late medieval period, Dionysius was associated with the idea and image of Mary's funeral. He was considered one of the those who witnessed her passing. At this point, we should bring an almost contemporary source into the discussion.

In a chapter of his *Legenda Aurea*, Jacobus de Voragine collected and tried to make sense of the many legends and accounts relating to the Assumption then circulating. First of all, he stated clearly that whatever he was going to recount on the transition of Mary to heaven was based on trustworthy sources.⁹⁰ Jacobus did not cite Latin hagiographical or homiletic sources on the subject. For example, he does not mention Gregory of Tours, whose important hagiographical collection he must have known,⁹¹ or early Latin homilies on the feast,⁹² and makes only a passing reference to Bernard of Clairvaux, who left an important set of homilies on the Assumption.⁹³ Instead Jacobus quotes what he believed were authoritative sources, especially eastern ones: the *Transitus* ascribed to John the Evangelist, the treatise on the *Divine Names* of Dionysius the Areopagite, 'the apostle Paul's disciple', which he quotes in full, a letter known as the *Cogitis me* written under the name of Jerome, sermons on the Assumption that circulated under the name of Augustine, and homilies of Greek authors (Germanus of Constantinople, John of Damascus, and Cosmas Vestitor, which had been translated into Latin since at least the late ninth century).⁹⁴ He also mentions more recent western accounts of miracles and mystical encounters with the Virgin. However, although delving into these earlier accounts of Mary's funeral,

the chapter of the *Legenda Aurea* dwells primarily on the idea of the unity of Mary's body with that of her Son, a unity which ultimately granted her Assumption and eternal glorification.

The *Legenda Aurea* became immensely popular soon after its composition. It became one of the most influential hagiographical works in the late mediaeval West and made a major contribution in shaping mental and visual pictures of Mary's transition into heaven. At the origins of these pictures, the account of her funeral given by Dionysius the Areopagite, the supposed disciple of Saint Paul, played an extremely important role.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have argued that among an array of apocryphal sources, the authoritative, albeit brief account of Mary's *transitus* given by the (supposedly) apostolic author, Dionysius, influenced the way Mary's funeral was thought of in Byzantium and in the West for centuries. Mary's exceptional assumption into heaven came to be justified by Greek homilists by the fact she had 'contained the uncontainable'. They were calling up the mental-figural image of the *Platyτέρα tōn ouranōn*, to which Dionysius definitively contributed. He had crafted an effective 'textual icon', which managed to encapsulate the mystery of the Incarnation and also to affect the way in which the Virgin was imagined in texts and figural arts.

Acknowledgements This chapter is offered as a token of friendship to Nick and Jaakko, who recently embraced monastic life on Mount Athos as, respectively, Evgenios, monk at Iveron and Damaskinos, hieromonk at Xenophontos.

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NOTES

1. *DN* III.2–3:681C–684B; 141–2; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 70). The passage was interpreted as a reference to Mary's *transitus* already by the earliest commentator on the CD, see John of Scythopolis, *Scholia on DN* 236, 8, PG 4:236C, 1–5; Suchla (ed.) (2011, 202, 9–204, 5). See Mimouni (1995, 338–9), Shoemaker (2002, 29–30), and Mainoldi (2018, 257–75) on the ancient and modern reception of the passage from *DN* III.2, which has not univocally been interpreted as a reference to the Dormition, cf. Jugie (1944, 99–101) and Andreopoulos (2016).
2. The earliest narratives of Mary's *transitus* are apocryphal texts written in various languages of the early Christian Near East. Characterised by details that reveal the origins for two narrative strands—the 'palm' and the 'Bethlehem' traditions—they aimed at recalling how Mary departed from the earthly life to be lifted up into heaven in spirit and body. Perhaps the earliest Greek apocryphal account of the Dormition, in Vat. Gr. 1982, was produced within the Johannite community before the first council of Nicea (325); see Manns (1989). Other early texts include: a letter of Pseudo-John known in Greek and Syriac (late fifth–late sixth centuries), for which, see Jugie (1944, 117–26) who notes that it pre-dates to the feast of the Assumption established by the Emperor Maurice (582–602), and Mimouni (1995, 118–27) who suggests a date between the late fifth and the early sixth centuries; the Greek account of Pseudo-Melito (mid-sixth century) that refers to Mary's resurrection, for which, see Jugie (1944, 111–16); various anonymous Latin narratives known as *Transitus Mariae* (fifth–sixth century), for which, see Jugie (1944, 106–8), van Esbroeck (1981), and Mimouni (1995, 257–99). With few exceptions, these texts were produced after the Council of Ephesus (431), when Mary's title of *Theotokos* and her exceptional role in the divine economy were elucidated through doctrinal explanations and illustrated through narratives; see Jugie (1926a, b, 1944), van Esbroeck (1981), Mimouni (1995, 2011), Shoemaker (2002, 2008, 2016a, b), Booth (2015), and Panagopoulos (2013); on the Council of Ephesus and the question of the *Theotokos*, see Price (2008).
3. Renoux (1961, 383) and Aubineau (1978–1980, 1, 138–40).
4. Avner (2011, 2015).
5. Mimouni (1995, 371–471) and Shoemaker (2002, 96, 115–6). On Maurice, see Nicephorus Callistus, *Historia ecclesiastica* 17, 28, PG 147:292A–B.
6. Shoemaker (2002, 123–4).
7. For recent appraisals of the question, see Lourié (2010) and Mainoldi (2018, 270–1).

8. *DN* III.2–3:681C–684B; 141–2; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 70).
9. See Shoemaker (2002, 32ff.).
10. Podolak (2013, 8–9).
11. Among the scholars of Mariology, notably Jugie (1944, 99–101) was against the idea that the Dionysian passage referred to Mary's *transitus*. See Mainoldi (2018, 258–9) for a recent appraisal of the question.
12. John of Scythopolis, *Scholia to DN* 236, 8, PG 4:236C,1–5; Suchla (ed.) (2011, 202, 9–204, 5): Ζωαρχικὸν καὶ θεοδόχον σῶμα ἴσως τὸ τῆς θεοτόκου λέγει τότε κοιμηθείσης; Rorem and Lamoreaux (trans.) (1998, 198–9): 'Perhaps by "source of life which bore God", he means the body of the holy Theotokos who at that time fell asleep'. On John of Scythopolis, see Podolak (2007; 2013, 6).
13. Once more I refer to Shoemaker (2002) for a repertoire of the numerous written sources and their discussion.
14. On this *eulogia* as a representation of Mary's funeral, see Shoemaker (2002, 107ff.).
15. Avner (2011, 15, 28).
16. Vikan (1982, 39–40).
17. Piacenza Pilgrim, *Itinerary*, CCSL 175:137–8; Wilkinson (trans.) (2002, 138), see also 132, map 26, for the journey through Scythopolis; van Esbroeck (1981, 276–82) on pilgrims' description of the sites connected to Mary's *transitus*.
18. For an appraisal, see Brubaker and Cunningham (2011, esp. xx–xxi).
19. The illustration of the *Koimesis* seems to have originated in Palestine and Cappadocia rather than in the capital, Constantinople. Even in the East, however, it is scarcely attested before the Cappadocian murals in the Açıkel Ağa Kilisesi of Belisırma (late seventh–early tenth centuries), for which, see Jolivet-Lévy (1991, 37, 327–8); the Ağaçaltı Kilisesi in the Ihlara Valley (period of the iconoclastic controversy?), for which, see Thierry (1998, 894–6) and Jolivet-Levy (2001, 306); St John or Ayvalı Kilisesi in the Güllü Dere, Çavuşin (years 913–20), for which, see Thierry (1994, vol. 2, 399) and Jolivet-Lévy (1991, 37); for the Tokalı Kilisesi, Göreme (mid tenth century), see Wharton Epstein (1986, 25–6) and Jolivet-Lévy (1991, 96, 102, 108). For an overview on the question and its literature, see De Giorgi (2016, 109–10).
20. Commented on in the seventh century by Maximus the Confessor, and in the early eighth century by John of Damascus, the CD was quoted to refute Monothelitism at the Lateran Synod of 649; see Geanakoplos (1969, 153), Alexakis (1996, 19, 85), and Allen and Neil (2004, 19ff.); and also Iconoclasm at the Lateran Synod of 769; see Alexakis (1994, 25; 1996, 118, 127, 129, 135). This notwithstanding, there is scarce evidence of Dionysius in the acts of the iconophile Council of Nicaea (787).

This has been tentatively attributed to the fact that the CD was not always available and that was better known in the Syro-Palestinian milieu rather than in the Byzantine capital. In this regard, Louth (1997, 331–2) noted that ‘the story of Denys and the iconoclastic controversy is an odd one: Denys haunts it, but remains very much in the background ... both in the Queen City, and in Palestine, and in the West’.

21. Andrew of Crete, *On the Dormition* II.9–10, PG 97:1060D–1064B, for the explicit references to Dionysius; II.16, PG 97:1069B, and III.2, PG 97:1092A for the reference to the couch; *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 127–8, 133, and 138). The sequence of Andrew’s first two homilies on the Dormition in the PG is normally reversed by commentators and translators, including Daley. On Dionysius and eighth-century authors, see Louth (1997) and Cunningham (2014). For the chronology of Andrew’s life and works, see Vailhé (1901–1902) and Auzépy (1995).
22. Andrew of Crete, *On the Dormition* II.7, PG 97:1056D; *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 124, and 135, n. 5), on the importance Andrew places on visual imagination in the contemplation of the mystery.
23. *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 29, 34).
24. Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Dormition* I.11, PG 98, 356C; *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 164). The Council of Hierēia in 754 would outlaw the production, veneration, and the liturgical and devotional use of ‘lifeless and dumb icons, made of material colors’; see Mansi XIII, 345C–D; ACO, II, 3.3, 768; Engl. trans. in Gero (1977, 91). Again, Theodore of Stoudios would explicitly and polemically speak on behalf of material images in his homily on the Dormition composed probably after 821; see his *On the Dormition*, 2, PG 99, 721B; *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 250): ‘her light shine through her painted image, and she offers it to the people for the life-giving kiss of relative veneration [σχετική προσκύνησις], even if the heretics are unwilling’.
25. John of Damascus, *On the Dormition* II.4, PTS 29:521, ll. 42–5; *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 208).
26. *Ibid.*, II.6–14, PTS 29:523–32; Daley (trans.), 209–18.
27. *Ibid.*, III.1, PTS 29:548, ll. 1–2; Daley (trans.) (1998, 231). In the same period, Bede speaks of a reading as a *ruminatio*: Cavallo (1994, 50) interprets this admission as reflecting the way in the early mediaeval period learned people like Bede looked not only at texts but also at figural images, scrutinising detail after detail with their mind and eyes.

28. John of Damascus, *On the Dormition* II.18, PTS 29:536–9, ll. 2–68; Daley (trans.) (1998, 225–6, 230, n. 34). The *Historia Euthymiaca* is a narrative about Mary's Dormition only known through fragmentary quotations, the earliest of which is this one in John of Damascus; see Wenger (1955, 136–9).
29. Podolak (2015).
30. See Teteriatnikov in the present volume.
31. See Kahsnitz (1987), Mayr-Harting (2004), Schmitt (2006), De Giorgi (2016), and Dell'Acqua (2019).
32. Theoteknos of Livias, *Encomium on the Assumption*, 1 (ἀνάληψιν), 9, 11 (soul and body), ed. Wenger (1955, 272, 276, 278) (text), 100–1 (comm.); *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 71, 73, 74), Mimouni (1995, 152–4), and Shoemaker (2002, 65). Theoteknos also made use of apocryphal accounts, although elaborating on them; for example, he mentions the 'palm' with which Mary was rewarded for her submission to God's will.
33. John of Thessalonica, *Homily on the Dormition of the Virgin*, PO 19.3:375–405. Two main sources have been hypothesised for John: Pseudo-Melito, for which, see Jugie (1944, 112, 139–50) and Mimouni (1995, 135–51); and a Greek version of the Syrian apocryphal narrative entitled *Obsequies of the Holy Virgin*, for which, see Wenger (1955, 17–67) (commentary), 209–41 (text) and Shoemaker (2002, 35, 210–11). With polemical accent, at the beginning of the homily, John remarks that the feast, observed on August 15 all over the Empire by imperial decree, had been ignored in Thessalonica and therefore his aim was to establish it there. This exception has been explained by modern scholars by the fact that Thessalonica was then under the jurisdiction of Rome, where the celebration of the Assumption was introduced only later; see *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 12–13).
34. John of Thessalonica, *Homily on the Dormition of the Virgin*, 12, PO 19.3:397; *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 63). Jugie (1944, 142) one of the most authoritative scholars on Mary's *transitus*, considered this homily to be an important inspiration for the Byzantine iconography of the Dormition or *Koimesis* in Greek. However, John of Thessalonica places emphasis on the corporeal and spiritual Assumption of Mary, whereas normally the *Koimesis* is represented simply as Mary's funeral, and eventually also her spiritual assumption into heaven, with the *animula*, her soul in the shape of an infant, handed by Christ over to the Archangel Michael to be brought up to heaven. The *Koimesis*, in sum, leaves aside Mary's bodily Assumption. De Giorgi (2016, 49) attributes a focal place in the textual background to the *Koimesis* to John of Thessalonica.

35. For example, see Andrew of Crete, *Dormitio* II.5, PG 97:1053C, and II.8, PG 97:1061A–1064B; *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 122, 126–7).
36. Even in the text of the definition of the dogma of the Assumption in 1950, there is no hint about Mary's death; see Mimouni (2011, 158).
37. John of Damascus, *Dormitio* I.10, PTS 29:494, ll. 4–6; *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 194).
38. Ibid., II.14, PTS 29:531 ll. 4–7; Daley (trans.) (1998, 217–18).
39. Ibid., II.10, PTS 29:527, ll. 4–9; Daley (trans.) (1998, 214). While John's writings have been studied by modern scholars in the context of Byzantine iconoclasm, his Marian homilies have received little attention.
40. Germanus of Constantinople, *Dormitio* II.3, PG 98:364A; *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 172). This homily appears in the PG as the third homily on the Dormition.
41. Dell'Acqua (2019).
42. *Sermones in Dormitionem Mariae*, CCCM 154.
43. *Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew*, Vassiliev (ed.) (1893, 11) and Wilmart and Tisserant (eds.) (1913, 321) for the first passage, and 348–9 for a commentary; in Shoemaker (trans.) (2016a, 94).
44. *Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew*, Vassiliev (ed.) (1893, 16): ὁ μήτρα οὐρανῶν ἀπλώματος πλατυτέρα! ὁ μήτρα χωρέσασα ὃν οἱ ἐπτά οὐανοὶ οὐ χωροῦσιν ... ὁ μήτρα εὐρυχωροτέρα ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν τὴν κτίσιν; Shoemaker (trans.) (2016a, 95).
45. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 21, 6–8; McVey (ed. and trans.) (1989, 174–5); see Reynolds (2012, 16–17).
46. Proclus of Constantinople, *Homilies on the Virgin* 3.v.49–50, Conostas (ed. and trans.) (2003, 200–1): τὸ δὲ μυστήριον τῆς θείας οἰκονομίας ἐβάσταζε παρθένου γαστήρ. ὁ γαστήρ οὐρανοῦ πλατυτέρα; *Homilies on the Virgin* 4.i.14–17, Conostas (ed. and trans.) (2003, 226–7): δεῦτε ἴδωμεν γαστέρα παρθένου πλατυτέραν τῆς κτίσεως· ὁ γὰρ ἐκεῖ μὴ χωρούμενος, ἐν ταύτῃ ἄστενοχωρήτως ἐχώρησε. καὶ ὁ ἐν τῇ χειρὶ καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν τεκοῦσαν βασιτάζων μετὰ πάντων, ὑπὸ ταύτης βασιτάζεται ('For the one whom [creation] cannot contain is contained in her without constriction. And he who bears all things, including the one who bore him, in the hollow of his hand, is himself borne about in [her womb]').
47. Proclus of Constantinople, *Homilies on the Virgin* 1.ii.26–31, Conostas (ed. and trans.) (2003, 138–9): Τίς εἶδεν, τίς ἤκουσεν ὅτι μήτραν ὁ Θεὸς ἀπεριγράπτως ὥκησεν; ὃν οὐρανὸς οὐκ ἐχώρησεν, γαστήρ οὐκ ἐστενοχώρησεν.
48. *Akathistos*, XV, 1–2, 6, Trypanis (ed.) (1968, 35): Ὁλος ἦν ἐν τοῖς κάτω καὶ τῶν ἄνω οὐδ' ὅλως / ἀπὴν ὁ ἀπερίγραπτος Λόγος · ... Χαῖρε, θεοῦ

- ἀχωρήτου χώρα (Peltomaa [trans.] 2001, 13: ‘The uncircumscribed Word was present wholly among those below, yet in no way absent from those above ... Hail container of the uncontainable God’); XVII, 6, Trypanis (ed.) (1968, 36): Χαῖρε, σοφίας θεοῦ δοχεῖον (Peltomaa [trans.] 2001, 15: ‘Hail, vessel of the wisdom of God’). See also Peltomaa (2011, 112).
49. *DN* I.6:596B; 119, 4–5: ὥς μεγέθει πάντων ὑπερέχοντα, καὶ ὥς ἐν αὐρᾷ λεπτή; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 55): ‘yet the one in the still breeze’. I prefer the Italian trans. by Scazzoso, in Bellini and Scazzoso (1981, 262) (‘quello che supera tutti in grandezza e come abitante nell’aura leggera’), which retains the word *aura* and renders better its quality of lightness and thinness. Luibheid and Rorem (1987, 55, n. 226) indicate as references 1 Kings 19, 12: ‘After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper’.
50. *DN* IX.1:909B; 207, 6–208, 1: Ἐπειδὴ δὲ καὶ τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρὸν ἀνατίθεται τῷ πάντων αἰτίῳ καὶ τὸ ταῦτόν καὶ τὸ ἕτερον καὶ τὸ ὅμοιον καὶ τὸ ἀνόμοιον καὶ ἡ στάσις καὶ ἡ κίνησις, φέρε, καὶ τούτων τῶν θεωνυμικῶν ἀγαλμάτων, ὅσα ἡμῖν ἐμφανῆ, θεωρήσωμεν. ‘Μέγας’ μὲν οὖν ὁ θεὸς ἐν τοῖς λογίοις ὑμνεῖται καὶ ἐν μεγέθει καὶ ἐν αὐρᾷ λεπτῇ τὴν θείαν ἐμφανούση σμικρότητα. Again, I prefer the Italian translation, Scazzoso, in Bellini and Scazzoso (1981, 364–5): ‘Dal momento che anche il Grande e il Piccolo sono attribuibili all’Autore di tutte le cose, e così il medesimo e l’Altro, il Simile e il Dissimile e lo Stato e il Moto, ora studiamo anche questi segni [ἀγάλματα, ossia simulacri] dei nomi divini, per quanto si possono vedere. Dunque, Dio è celebrato come Grande nelle Scritture e nella Grandezza e nell’aura sottile che manifesta la divina Piccolezza’. John of Scythopolis in his *Scholia*, PG 4:368D–369A; Suchla (ed.) (2011, 393, 1–3), a propos of ἀγάλματα, mentions ἀνδριάντες, statues without limbs, or busts, also called Ἑρμᾶς (herms). Bellini in Bellini and Scazzoso (1981, 364–5, n. 1) notes that the Neoplatonist Proclus already spoke of images or statues in the context of the divine names, since, just as through language, the nature of the gods could be made present to human intelligence, so too could statues of gods make them present to the senses.
51. See for example Weis (1985) and Pentcheva (2006, 146). In the *Historical Dictionary of the Orthodox Church*, Prokurat, Golitzin, Peterson (1996, s.v.) ‘Icons of the Theotokos’, 167–8 state: ‘the platyttera (“she whose womb is more spacious than the heavens”) [is the icon type] showing the child in triumph within the mother’.
52. *MTh* I.3:1000C–B; 143, 8–10; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 136).
53. Cameron (1992, 24–5).

54. On the idea of 'textual icons', see the third chapter of Dell'Acqua (forthcoming).
55. On these early examples, see Kondakov (1914–1915), Italian trans. (2014, 291–300), Grabar (1957), and Weis (1985, 22–3); but for recent appraisals, see Gianandrea (2011, 401) and Cantone (2011).
56. For a discussion, see Cantone (2011, esp. 18ff.).
57. Pitarakis (2000) and Pentcheva (2006, 146).
58. *CH* IV.4:181B; 23, 3–5: τὴν δὲ Μαριὰμ ὅπως ἐν αὐτῇ γενήσεται τὸ θεαρχικὸν τῆς ἀφθέγκτου θεοπλαστίας μυστήριον; *DN* II.9:648A; 133, 5–8: Ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ πάσης θεολογίας ἐκφανέστατον, ἡ καθ' ἡμᾶς Ἰησοῦ θεοπλαστία, καὶ ἄρρητός ἐστι λόγῳ παντὶ καὶ ἀγνωστος νῶ παντὶ, καὶ αὐτῷ τῷ πρωτίστῳ τῶν πρεσβυτάτων ἀγγέλων. Καὶ τὸ μὲν ἀνδρικῶς αὐτὸν οὐσιωθῆναι, μυστικῶς παρειλήφαμεν; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 65) (amended); cf. with the Italian translation of Scazzoso in Bellini and Scazzoso (1981, 277–8): 'ciò che esprime nel modo migliore tutto ciò che si può dire di Dio, ossia la divina formazione [θεοπλαστία, ossia l'incarnazione] di Gesù secondo la nostra natura, è ineffabile per qualsiasi lingua e incomprensibile per qualsiasi intelligenza, anche per il primo degli angeli più venerabili. Che egli abbia assunto una sostanza umana lo abbiamo appreso come un mistero'.
59. Theoteknos of Livias, *Encomium on the Assumption*, 1, Wenger (ed.) (1955, 272, 100–1) (comm.); *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 71).
60. Andrew of Crete, *Homily on the Annunciation*, 6, PG 97:896A; see also 11:905B; Cunningham (trans.) (2008, 206 and 214).
61. Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Dormition* II.2, PG 98:361B; *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 171).
62. *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 21).
63. John of Damascus, *On the Dormition* I.13, PTS 29:498; *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies*, Daley (trans.) (1998, 198).
64. Tempesta (ed.) (2010), Gianandrea (2010, 2011, 2014), Osborne (2014), and Foletti and Gianandrea (2015, 201–16). More scholarly contributions are about to appear on this mural painting, which came under the lens of historians, see McKittrick, 2018.
65. The complete inscription giving the name of Constantine was uncovered in 2012; see Osborne (2014, 330–1).
66. *Liber Pontificalis* I, 350; Davis (trans.) (2010, 72); Acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680–1): ACO, II, 2.2 (Berlin, 1992), 870–1, on the papal embassy to Constantinople in 680. On the role of clerics of Greek origin in papal politics between the late seventh and early eighth centuries, including those who donated the mural painting in S. Sabina, see Sansterre (1984), Brunet (2011), McKittrick (2016, 269–70), and Ferrazza (forthcoming).

67. Gianandrea (2011, 404–5).
68. Tempesta (ed.) (2010).
69. A *Platyτέρα* is depicted in a niche in the south wall of Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome, painted probably under Pope Paul I (757–67); another in the Sacro Speco at Subiaco dating to the late eighth and the early ninth centuries; see Gianandrea (2011, 401) and Osborne (2014, 331).
70. Osborne (2014, 333) on the linguistic phenomenon of the betacism (the letter ‘b’ used instead of ‘v’) in the inscription, which is found also elsewhere in eighth-century Rome, notably in the inscription of the votive panel in the Chapel of Theodotus in S. Maria Antiqua painted under Pope Zacharias (741–52).
71. Agatho, *First Letter to Emperor Constantine IV*, PL 87:1191D–1194A, about DN, 2, on the unity and distinction within the Godhead: Ὁ ἅγιος Διονύσιος ὁ Ἀρεοπαγίτης ὁ ἐπίσκ. Ἀθηνῶν ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῷ περὶ θεῶν ὀνομάτων etc.
72. De’ Maffei (1985, 288–9).
73. Toesca (1904), Belting (1968), De’ Maffei (1985), and Mitchell (1993); see an appraisal in Dell’Acqua (2013).
74. There are many studies connecting Autpert with the conception of specific works of art; see Dell’Acqua (2013, 36–7).
75. Ambrose Autpert, *Sermo in Purificatione sanctae Mariae*, 1, Weber (ed.) (1979, 8–9, 985): ‘paruulus Virginis filius, cuius diuinitate non capit mundus’; *ibid.*, 4, 3–4, 988: ‘Amplectimini paruulum, sed cogitate inmensum. Amate humiliatum, sed timete excelsum’.
76. Ambrose Autpert, *Sermo in Purificatione sanctae Mariae*, 3, Weber (ed.) (1979, 33–57, 987).
77. Ambrose Autpert, *Sermo in Purificatione sanctae Mariae*, 6, Weber (ed.) (1979, 991, 35–40): ‘non iam carne paruulum, sed diuinitate inmensum’; see also *ibid.*, 10, 3–29, 994–5: a long passage about the paradoxical nature of Christ’s combining humanity and divinity, and many other opposites: ‘In una Redemptoris nostri Dei hominis que persona perfectam Dei, perfectam que hominis inesse confitemur naturam, et ex una quidem Dominum, ex altera seruum, ex una fortem, ex altera infirmum, ex una magnum, ex altera paruulum, ex una creantem, ex altera creatum ... aliud magnus, aliud paruus ... ex uno uenerabatur ut Deus, ex altero despiciabatur ut homo’.
78. Ambrose Autpert, *Sermo in Purificatione sanctae Mariae*, 3, Weber (ed.) (1979, 52–3, 987).
79. Gambero (2007, 270).
80. Ambrose Autpert, *Expositio in Apocalypsin*, praefatio, Weber (ed.) (1975, 17, 474–99): ‘Domine, Deus meus, aeternae ac sempiternae Deus meus, incommutabilis et solus immortalis, ac summe bonus Deus meus, sine mole magnus, sine situ praesens, cuncta uirtute conplectens Deus meus,

- inuisibilis, incorporeus, et inconprehensibilis Deus meus, creator omnium rerum uisibilium et inuisibilium Deus meus, lux inaccessibilis, lux que mentium Deus meus etc.'. He also uses this passage in the *Oratio contra septem vitia* [Recensio B], 2, Weber (ed.) (1979, 948), Weber (1976, 113–14) already compared these texts.
81. For example, see Ambrose Autpert, *Expositio in Apocalypsin*, 1, 1, 5c, Weber (ed.) (1975) (CCCM 27), 47, 18–9; 10, 21, 23 (CCCM 27A), 827, 1–17; *Sermo in Purificatione sanctae Mariae*, 3, Weber (ed.) (1979, 987, 52–3); *Oratio contra septem vitia* [Recensio A], 14, Weber (ed.) (1979, 25, 943).
 82. See also the use of the adjective 'ineffabilis' to describe Christ by Paulinus of Aquileia (d. 802), a Lombard theologian in the service of Charlemagne who was especially engaged in opposing Adoptionism; *Contra Felicem libri tres*, I, 12, 17, 24, 36, 38; II, 17, 23, CCCM 95:17, l. 6, 23, l. 20, 30, l. 20, 42, l. 6, 46, l. 31, 66, l. 2, 74, l. 14.
 83. On Autpert and the Greek Christian tradition, a theme which has been neglected by previous scholars, see chapter three of Dell'Acqua (forthcoming).
 84. This representation is a special kind of *imago clipeata*, a *pars pro toto* representation in which the bust and the head represent a whole person. This design derives from pagan art and is designed to conjure up the subject's presence and surround him or her in an aura of glory allusive to his or her spiritual, intellectual, military, or moral achievements; see Grabar (1957, 212). On the *imago clipeata* in the *transitus Mariae*, see Kahsnitz (1987, 92, and 101–6).
 85. Images normally related to her motherhood, such as the Annunciation, Nativity, and Presentation/Purification, are not depicted on these walls. Aronberg Lavin (2005, 96–7) has argued that the Assisi cycle is remarkable because it is the first to focus 'not on Mary's motherhood, but on Mary herself'. It goes without saying that the importance of Mary in the history of salvation is bound to her maternal role; therefore, this distinction does not seem appropriate.
 86. The earlier date is supported by Hueck (1981, 279) and Romano (1984); the later date by Bellosi (1998, 147–76, 207–13).
 87. Aronberg Lavin (2005, 96, 108).
 88. Meiss (1962, 83–5) and Aronberg Lavin (2005, 98–9).
 89. Aronberg Lavin (2001; 2005, 101–6; 2008).
 90. Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 119; Ryan (trans.) (2012, 463–83, esp. 465 and 477) on Dionysius.
 91. Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Martyrs*, 3–4, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum, 1.2:39; van Dam (trans.) (1988, 4).

92. Ambrose Autpert, *Sermo de Adsumptione*, Weber (ed.) (1979, 1025–36); Paul the Deacon, *First homily on the Assumption*, and *Second homily on the Assumption*, Buono (ed.).
93. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones in assumptione beatae Mariae Virginis*, and *Sermo in dominica infra octauam assumptionis beatae Mariae Virginis*, in *Bernardi opera*, eds. Leclercq and Rochais 5: 228–74.
94. Edited in *Sermones in Dormitionem Mariae*, A.P. Orbán (ed.) (2000). Since the original Greek texts by Cosmas Vestitor are lost, their late ninth-century Latin translation (*Ibid.*, 93–126) and citations from them made by Jacobus are particularly significant; see Wenger (1953, 293; 1955, 155–72 [commentary], 313–33 [text]). Quadrio (1951, 95–6) wrongly believed that the Greek tradition of the Dormition had not been received in the West prior to Jacobus de Voragine.

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Pseudo-Dionysius and the Post-Iconoclastic Mosaic Programme of Hagia Sophia

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The works of Pseudo-Dionysius titled *Celestial Hierarchy* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, which are a part of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, continue to attract diverse interests. Some scholars identify the role of both hierarchies in the theological discourse of the Dionysian universe and their influence on Church Fathers of Late Antiquity and beyond¹; others see his works as a solution to contemporary theological discourse.² Art historians, on the other hand, have looked at the potential role of Pseudo-Dionysius' works in the areas of art, architecture, and church decoration.³ When dealing with the latter, scholars primarily focus on the eleventh- and twelfth-century churches. The role of Pseudo-Dionysius in new church decorations after Iconoclasm has been overlooked, probably because little is known about the perception of his figure and his works in ninth-century Byzantium. The mosaic programme of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, created during the second half of the ninth century, is a case in point (Fig. 9.1). This programme is one of the earliest that displays holy images arranged in hierarchical order in the central nave of the church, reflecting the celestial and ecclesiastical

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Fig. 9.1 Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, interior, looking east (Photo credit Natalia B. Teteriatnikov)

hierarchies of Pseudo-Dionysius. This essay considers Pseudo-Dionysius' concepts found in his *Celestial* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies* and their possible impact on the mosaics of Hagia Sophia and other examples of post-iconoclastic Byzantine church decoration. It evaluates interest in Dionysius the Areopagite in eighth- and ninth-century Constantinople and Byzantine provinces. Finally, it suggests that re-establishing the veneration of Dionysius the Areopagite as a saint after Iconoclasm stimulated an interest in his works that contributed to their possible appropriation in Byzantine church decoration.

DIONYSIUS AND HIS CONCEPT OF HIERARCHY

Pseudo-Dionysius, the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, is known under a fictional name: Dionysius the Areopagite, the first-century bishop of Athens. For a long time, scholars thought that he probably

lived in Syria and then worked in Constantinople during the last decades of the fifth and first decades of the sixth century. Based on detailed analyses of his works, Ernesto Mainoldi recently proposed that the name Dionysus the Areopagite may have actually been a group of theologians who operated in Constantinople during the time of Justinian, and who produced a *corpus* in which they express their response to contemporary theological and philosophical discourse.⁴ In the beginning, the *Corpus Dionysiacum* was accessible only to a narrow circle of theologians in Constantinople, but was soon copied in Greek and Syriac as it spread to the Near East. As part of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, the *Celestial Hierarchy* and the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* slowly penetrated monastic communities, especially in the Near East, the works reaching a wider audience in Constantinople and the West in the early Middle Ages. In his *Corpus*, Pseudo-Dionysius presented a Christianised version of Neoplatonic metaphysics that was already pervasive in Late Antiquity. Scholars have identified the general structure of Pseudo-Dionysius' celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies as being modelled on the Neoplatonic triads.⁵ The function of both hierarchies was to provide a connection between men and God through enlightenment. But how are the structure and function of Pseudo-Dionysius' hierarchies, as formulated in its highly developed rhetoric, related to and visualised in the mosaics of Hagia Sophia and other Byzantine church programmes in the ninth and early tenth centuries? In pursuing this task, it is important to keep in mind that the visual and intellectual realms do not always align as we might expect.

BYZANTINE CHURCH DECORATION IN CONSTANTINOPLE AND PROVINCES

To understand the artistic and theological landscape of this period, I will first examine surviving programmes or those known through *ekphrāseis* (a verbal description of an object, event, person, works of art or architecture) by contemporary authors in Constantinople and its provinces in the context of Pseudo-Dionysius' celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies.

In Constantinople, only the mosaics of Hagia Sophia have partially survived. Built and decorated by Emperor Justinian, Hagia Sophia (532–7) received its first figurative mosaics in the central nave after Iconoclasm (Figs. 9.1 and 9.2). This programme was not executed at once. Mosaics



Fig. 9.2 Hagia Sophia, view towards the dome and the tympana (*Photo credit* Natalia B. Teteriatnikov)

were gradually introduced during the reign of Basil I (867–86), the first being the Virgin and Child in the apse and two archangels in the bema (c.867) (Fig. 9.3).⁶ Echelons of celestial and terrestrial images were included in the north and south tympana in the last decades of the ninth century, during the reign of Basil's son and successor, Leo VI (886–912) (Figs. 9.4 and 9.5).⁷ The medallion image of the Virgin flanked by apostles Peter and Paul was displayed on the western arch (Fig. 9.1); these no longer survive but were documented by Gaspare Fossati and Wilhelm Salzenberg in their watercolours and drawings.⁸ According to Jane Timken-Mathews, this programme may have featured Christ Pantocrator⁹ in the dome according to an inscription which was originally located in the north and south tympana and currently missing; the latter was recorded by Gaspare Fossati and known today from the records of Silvio Giuseppe Mercati.¹⁰ As for the tympana mosaics, only some figures of Church Fathers and fragments of mosaics have survived (Figs. 9.4–9.5).¹¹ The programme was almost intact when the Fossati brothers began the restoration of mosaics in Hagia Sophia in 1847–1849. The Fossati and Salzenberg drawings and watercolours show general views and details of the mosaics of



Fig. 9.3 Hagia Sophia, apse (*Photo credit* Natalia B. Teteriatnikov)

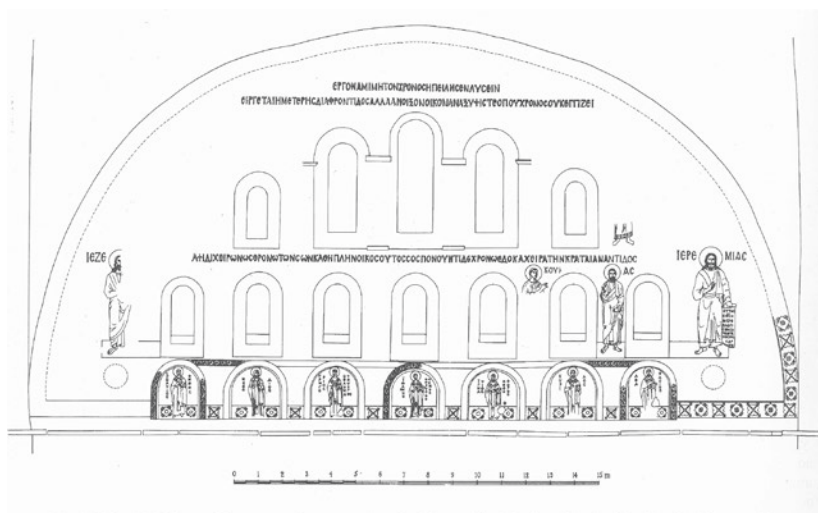


Fig. 9.4 Hagia Sophia, north tympanum (Diagram, from Mango and Hawkins [1972, diag. IV])

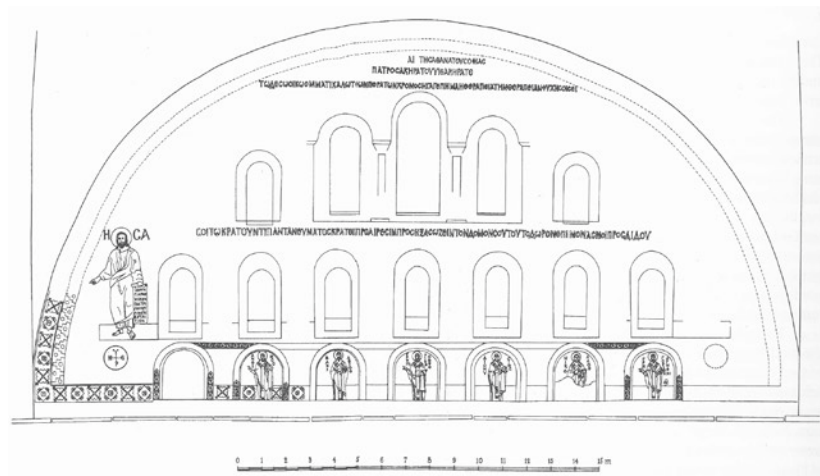


Fig. 9.5 Hagia Sophia, south tympanum (Diagram from Mango and Hawkins [1972, diag. III])

both tympana displayed in three registers. With the help of their drawings and watercolours, Cyril Mango reconstructed the programme of the north and south tympana (Figs. 9.4 and 9.5).¹² He also included the names of prophets and Church Fathers on the basis of the above-mentioned documentation. According to Mango's diagrams, the semicircular tympana displayed images in three registers. The upper register probably represented angels or archangels; only a fragment survives. The middle register depicted twelve minor prophets who were placed between windows, while four major prophets were located at the end of the register: Ezekiel and Jeremiah in the north tympanum and Daniel (?) and Isaiah in the south tympanum. The lower register included fourteen niches, seven in each tympanum, containing images of Church Fathers. This programme visualises the concept of the hierarchical order of the universe, by displaying the angelic order at the highest level and closest to God, while placing terrestrial hierarchs, such as prophets and Church Fathers, on the lowest level and closest to worshippers standing in the nave.

Information on the decoration of other churches of Constantinople can be extracted from descriptions by contemporary writers and theologians. One example comes from the homily of Patriarch Photius, who delivered it for an *encaenia* of the Church of the Virgin of the Pharos in

the imperial palace (probably c.864).¹³ It is unclear from this description whether the plan of this church was cross-in-square or cross-domed, but it was surely a domed church.¹⁴ The description begins with the dome, which is described as decorated with the image of Christ. Below there are choirs of angels followed by apostles, martyrs, prophets, and patriarchs. The apse is reserved for the image of the Virgin. Although fragmented, this description of the decoration of the Church of the Virgin of the Pharos includes major elements of Pseudo-Dionysius' hierarchy, which are displayed according to his concept of order. By stating that 'He [the Creator] oversees the orderly arrangement and government,' Photius not only singles out the concept of order in the programme but also the importance of its government; that is, how the orderly system operates.

Another example is Sermon 34 by Emperor Leo VI on the church commissioned by Stylianos Zaoutzas, his father-in-law (c.886–93).¹⁵ In his description of the decoration of this church, Leo VI treats figural images as categories, and assigns the celestial images including Christ, angels/archangels, etc. to the summit of the church, that is to the upper dome and vaults. The lower walls of the church he reserves for scenes depicting the mystery of the Incarnation, that is, stories from the Life of Christ and the Virgin. Leo describes the decoration of the church from top to bottom as a hierarchical display of images. As presented by the author, this display evokes the way Dionysius portrays celestial and terrestrial beings in his *Celestial Hierarchy* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. The general principle of the programme in the Church of the Virgin of the Pharos and the church commissioned by Stylianos Zaoutzas, although differently arranged, mirrored the concept of the order of images on the north and south tympana in Hagia Sophia. The church of Stylianos Zaoutzas was probably a small cross-in-square building.¹⁶ Thus, the *ekphrāseis* written by Photius and Leo VI both present Christ in the dome as a creator of the universe with the images depicted in an orderly fashion on the vaults and walls below.

Similar trends can be traced in the church decorations of the Byzantine provinces. The better preserved murals come from the rock-cut churches in Cappadocia. One is the fresco decoration in the Ağaç Altı Kilise in Ihlara (dated probably to the second part of the ninth or early tenth century) (Figs. 9.6 and 9.7).¹⁷ This rock-cut church has a cruciform plan surmounted by a dome on squinches over the central crossing. The dome displays the scene of the Ascension where

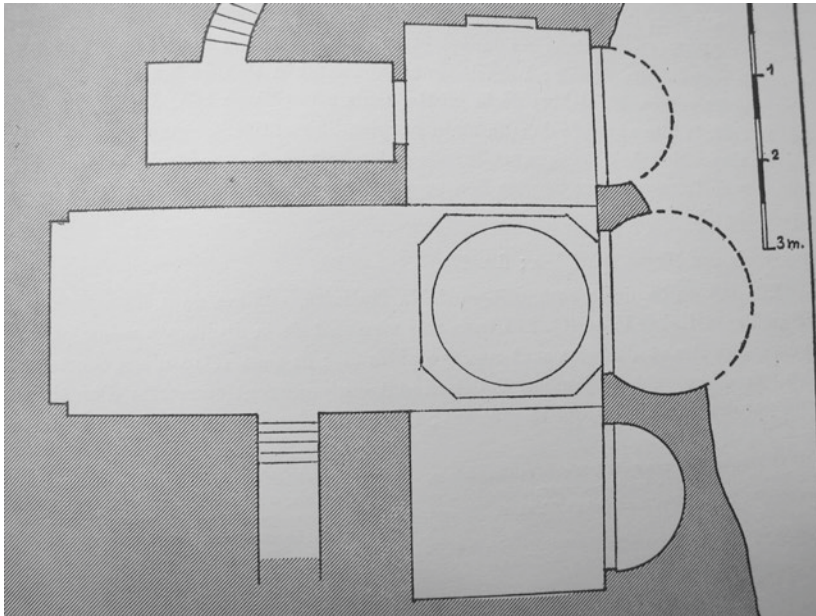


Fig. 9.6 Ağaç Altı Kilise, Ihlara (Plan after Thierry [1963, Fig. 16])

Christ is depicted in a central medallion; the register below is divided into segments, each displaying groups of angels. The middle register depicts prophets, whereas the lowest register (on the walls below the dome) shows apostles. The scenes from the Life of Christ are arranged on the walls of three arms of the naos. Here, the author of this programme adjusted the hierarchical order of celestial and terrestrial images to a local architectural setting. Each register of the dome is divided by segments which include angels, prophets, or apostles. The vertical display of images, arranged in hierarchical order, resembles the programme of Hagia Sophia, of the church of Stylianos Zaoutzas, and of the chapel of the Virgin of the Pharos in Constantinople. Cappadocia was a province of Constantinople and it is likely that the patron of Ağaç Altı Kilise, Ihlara, was familiar with new trends in the capital.

Kılıçlar Kilisesi in the Göreme valley is another rock-cut church that displays images in hierarchical fashion. This small church has a cross-in-square plan that dates to c.900.¹⁸ Like Ağaç Altı Kilise, Ihlara, it shows



Fig. 9.7 Ağaç Altı Kilise, Ihlara, Cappadocia. Dome, Ascension (*Photo credit* Natalia B. Teteriatnikov)

the scene of the Ascension in the dome. Pendentives display four medallion images of apostles, whereas prophets are arranged on the upper arches and vaults. Scenes from the Life of Christ, etc., are displayed on the walls. The arrangement of images also somewhat resembles Stylianos Zaoutzas' church discussed above.

Few churches in Greece dating to the ninth century preserve their murals; only bits and pieces survive, making it difficult to understand the full extent of their programmes.

The mosaics of the dome in the Hagia Sophia of Thessaloniki is an example. The dome's decoration belongs to the second phase of mosaic production, dating to the second part of the ninth century.¹⁹ Here, the large dome is decorated with the Ascension, in which Christ in a mandorla, supported by two angels, floats above the centre of the nave. Below, in the dome are depicted the apostles with the Virgin *orans* divided by cypress trees. Here, Christ is at the centre of the universe with apostles below. The image of the Ascension replaced the cross decoration created during the reign of Empress Eirene (780–90, 797–802), as her monograms and the one of her son Constantine VI displayed in



Fig. 9.8 Church of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna (*Photo credit* Natalia B. Teteriatnikov)

the bema vault suggest. The decoration of the dome recalls that found in Kılıçlar Kilisesi in Göreme and Ağaç Altı Kilise in Ihlara discussed above.

St. Andrew in Peristerai, near Thessaloniki, is another example. It was built, according to the *vita* of St. Euphymius, in 870–1 and presumably was decorated around this time, as well. The patron of this church, Euphymius, came to Peristerai from Bithynia, Asia Minor, where he could have been acquainted with new trends in church planning and decoration. The patron rebuilt a pre-existing church into a five-domed church. It has been suggested that its plan echoed that of the Justinianic Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople.²⁰ It has been further posited that the master builders came from major centres, either from Constantinople or Thessaloniki. The church has a cross-in-square centre covered with a large dome. Triconch units have been added to each side of the square, each covered with a smaller dome. This plan was well

suited for a new scheme of fresco decoration. This example provides some information of how local patrons and artisans presented a hierarchical order of figural images in this church. The frescoes preserved in the remodelled area of the church are mostly in the central dome and vaults. The dome displays an image of Christ, while the dome's walls below are reserved for the apostles and the four evangelists. The vaults supporting the dome depict pairs of angels while the Virgin and Child take their place in the eastern apse. Notably, the prophets and Church Fathers are absent in this programme, so the emphasis is given to the New Testament message through the presence of apostles and evangelists. Because the paintings on the lower walls are missing, it is difficult to know what was depicted. Still the orderly arrangement of holy images in the dome and vaults resemble what we already observed in the decoration of churches of Constantinople and Cappadocia. In all of these churches, the image of Christ appears at the centre of the dome.

Although limited, the discussed examples allow us to recognise a new trend in decorative programmes in the churches around the eastern Mediterranean. These churches differ in plans and architectural configurations, but they are all domed churches with emphasis on the central space. The walls and vaults around this area articulate spaces for the orderly display of images—a new trend which manifested a change from church murals before Iconoclasm. All these decorative programmes show an image of Christ as creator of the universe at the centre of the dome, with heavenly beings and holy figures on the lower vaults and walls, each image placed according to its rank. This change in the decoration of ninth-century churches becomes apparent if we look at earlier church decoration for comparison.

BYZANTINE CHURCH ARCHITECTURE DURING ICONOCLASM

The display of images in late antique churches seems to illustrate Thomas Mathew's view of the basilica type as emphasising the processional direction towards the apse, resembling the ritual of the Little Entrance, that is a procession of the clergy with the Gospel Book through the nave to the altar.²¹ The nave walls of these churches were decorated with rows of saints and martyrs marching in the direction of the apse as seen in churches like Sant'Apollinare Nuovo and Sant'Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna (Fig. 9.8).²² During the Iconoclast

period, the situation became more complex. Some scholars posited that new, centrally planned churches came to the fore because the Little Entrance had been omitted and, instead, the performance of the Great Entrance, when the holy gifts carried by the clergy were transported from the side pastophoria to the altar, had taken a prominent place in the liturgy, thus allowing the faithful to have a better view of

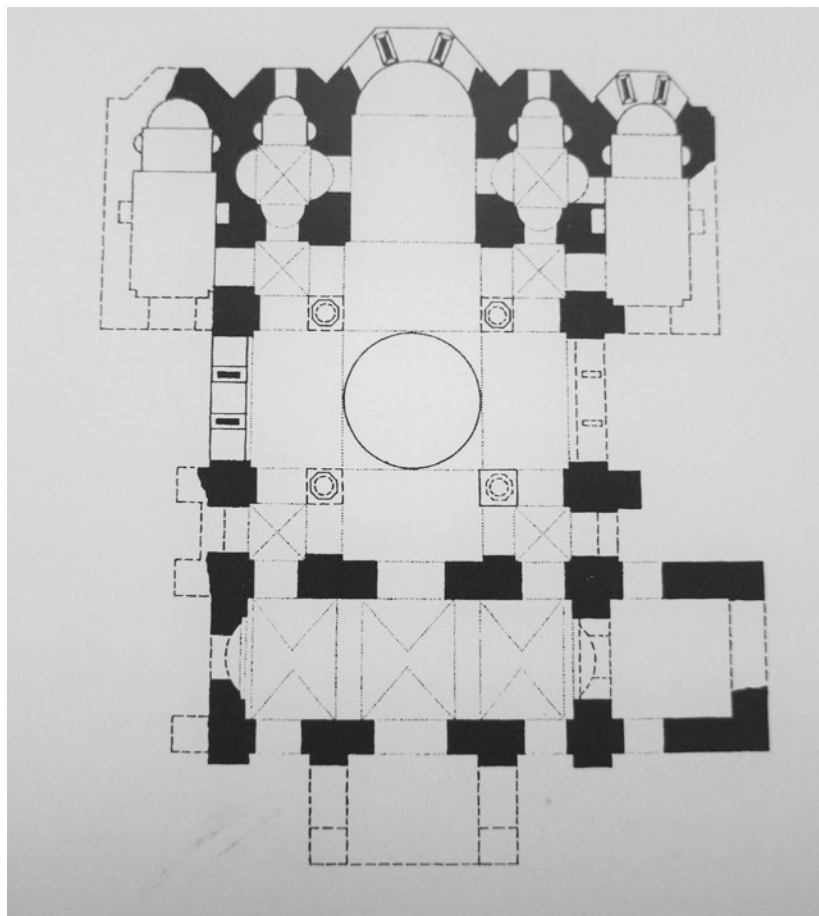


Fig. 9.9 Church of the Theotokos, monastery of Constantine Lips, Istanbul (Plan after Ousterhout [1999], fig. 20 [A])

the procession of the gifts (Fig. 9.9).²³ Vasilius Marinis recently argued, however, that there is no connection between the church's shape and the performance of the liturgy.²⁴ Surely, during this period, the Great Entrance was performed in churches with different plans. The churches may have had single or multiple sanctuaries. The sanctuaries of these churches were separated from the naos by tall templon screens, so the interior of the sanctuary became invisible to the faithful. Yet the space in front of the sanctuary well suited the procession of the gifts during the Great Entrance. But what was the advantage of centrally planned buildings for church decoration of this period?

Notably, centralised cathedrals in three major Byzantine cities belong to a new transitional type of domed-churches such as Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki,²⁵ Hagia Eirene in Constantinople,²⁶ and the Church of the Dormition in Nicea.²⁷ These churches are crowned with large domes covering spacious central naves. While the Church of Dormition was built and decorated sometime in the early eighth century, Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki²⁸ and Hagia Eirene in Constantinople (recently re-attributed to the last decade of the eighth century, a date that is currently accepted by scholars)²⁹ were constructed and received mosaic decoration after the first Iconoclasm, during the reign of the empress Eirene (787–97). The dome and apse of these two churches originally displayed an image of a cross. The question is why the domes of these churches were still decorated with the image of the cross? Maria Panayotidi suggested that this can be explained by religious and cultural continuity of aniconic decoration in the churches, as well as strong belief in the cross as symbol of Christ.³⁰ Furthermore, at the time of the Empress Eirene, pre-Iconoclast churches with aniconic decoration were still standing, like Hagia Sophia, a neighbour of Hagia Eirene in Constantinople. It is not surprising, therefore, that Empress Eirene chose an abstract decoration for Hagia Eirene to match the original Justinianic decoration of Hagia Sophia. Although figurative images were indeed made and venerated during the reign of Eirene, the cross continued to be a major image in church decoration.

Alongside large, domed churches, a new, smaller, cross-in-square type emerged. Although the origin of this type is still not entirely clear, scholars agree that this type of church appeared sometime at the end of the eighth century,³¹ such as the Fatih Çamii in Trilye, St. John of Peleklete in Constantinople, and others.³² As Robert Ousterhout noted, these small churches were mostly private foundations that

served small congregations and became popular in the ninth and tenth centuries,³³ as can be seen in the monastery Church of Constantine Lips, Constantinople (c.906) (Fig. 9.9). Whether large or small, these churches emphasise the dome, which contributed to a dramatic setting of the performance of the liturgy when natural light came through its windows and brightened the space below.³⁴ First appearing during the reign of Emperor Justin II (565–78), the *Cherubikon* hymn was chanted under the dome at the centre of the church.³⁵ During Iconoclasm and after the first Iconoclasm, when images were again permitted, the cross was a major image in the decoration of the dome.³⁶ Thus, for iconoclasts and iconodules, the cross in the dome symbolised Christ and his death by crucifixion.³⁷ It seems that after the Triumph of Orthodoxy, when image veneration was re-established, churches needed to conceptualise a new ideology and present a novel display in the sacred space. Centrally planned domed churches, such as the cross-domed church, the cross-in-square, or the cross-plan church, presented a solution for a vertical, virtual display of images. The depiction of Christ or of his Ascension in the dome became paramount for displaying Christ as the centre of the universe. The vaults and walls below were visually suited for the hierarchical depiction of images, as in the case of the above-mentioned churches, including the Virgin of the Pharos and the church of Leo VI's father-in-law. These were cases in which the central space of the domed building suited a new type of a hierarchical decorative programme. Otto Demus was the first to note the importance of the vertical display of images in the cross-in-square churches, starting with the dome.³⁸ Thus, the central space of these domed churches, small or large, provided more visibility and had greater, dramatic lighting effects during the liturgical performance, as well as a hierarchical display of images with Christ at the centre of the dome.

In the Constantinopolitan Hagia Sophia, the sixth-century architectural setting was updated with a new decorative programme, which sought to emphasise further the central space under the dome, where an image of Christ Pantocrator was probably depicted (Fig. 9.2). Thus, displaying images in hierarchical order on both sides of the nave was meant to unite the heavenly and earthly realms in the naos. The question as to how Pseudo-Dionysius' concept of both hierarchies may have contributed to a new model of church decoration during this period remains.

THE PERCEPTION OF DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE DURING AND AFTER ICONOCLASM

When looking at ninth-century church decorative programmes, what becomes apparent is their new, orderly display of images in the dome, vaults, and murals, though the choices of images were varied. This arrangement evokes the concept of order found in Pseudo-Dionysius' works. The question is how to interpret this connection. The concept of order could have been filtered through theologians who had appropriated it from Dionysius' works since Late Antiquity, or it could have come directly from his writings. John of Scythopolis, Maximus the Confessor, and John of Damascus made significant contributions to the study of Dionysius. In his third oration in *On the Divine Images* (between c.726–50),³⁹ John of Damascus explains different kinds of images and has recourse to Pseudo-Dionysius to justify his argument:

... the use in Scripture of shapes and forms and figures (σχήματα και μορφὰς και τύπους) to convey a faint conception of God and of the angels by depicting in bodily form what is invisible and bodiless, because we cannot behold the bodiless without using shapes that bear some analogy to us, as Dionysios the Areopagite says.⁴⁰

In addition, there were theologians who, during iconoclastic debates, already understood the importance of the hierarchical concept of order when dealing with celestial beings and the ecclesial orders in their writings. They created a new mindset that stimulated the process of developing new models for church decoration, as well as the ways these models fit within the space of centrally planned, domed churches. Sources such as the treatises of Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople (715–30) and the defense of images by John of Damascus had already paved the way for this new church decoration that revolved around the orderly arrangement of images and the presence of celestial and terrestrial beings. However, the concepts of Pseudo-Dionysius began to have more direct influence on the development of Byzantine church decoration, I argue, during the second Iconoclasm; the iconodule community and particularly the activity of Studite monks and the future patriarch of Constantinople, Methodius, promoted the works of Dionysius the Areopagite. In this context, with his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, Dionysius offered not only a concept of the order of the celestial and terrestrial beings, but also its link to society:

The sacred scriptural tablets have a lesson for those capable of being divinized, being rooted in the sacred and godlike upliftings of the sacraments. They teach that God himself thus gives substance and arrangement to everything which exists, including the legal hierarchy and society....⁴¹

Furthermore, in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, he explains how the hierarchy works:

Indeed the Word of God teaches those of us who are its disciples that in this fashion— though more clearly and more intellectually – Jesus enlightens our blessed superiors, Jesus who is transcendent mind, and utterly divine mind, who is the source and the being underling all hierarchy, all sanctification, all workings of God, who is the ultimate in divine power. He assimilates them, as much as they are able, to his own light.⁴²

Hence, this hierarchical model was instrumental for the Church in visualising how God is united with the faithful through his own light.

The interest in Pseudo-Dionysius and his works in Byzantium was revived during the second Iconoclasm, and it was twofold. As far as the Constantinopolitan court is concerned, scholars have found that officials had an interest in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, but that it was limited to diplomatic purposes. The *Corpus* was also used by learned members of the imperial court.⁴³ First, this interest coincided with the diplomatic relationship between Constantinople and the West. The preserved manuscript of Pseudo-Dionysius in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, gr. 437, is a token of this relationship.⁴⁴ In 824, Michael II (820–9) sent an envoy to deliver a letter to the King of Franks, Louis the Pious, in which he asked the king to expel the Greek iconodule monks and clerics from Rome and to support his iconoclast policies. Louis convened a synod in Paris (825). Gathering dogmatic passages from Church Fathers, including Pseudo-Dionysius, the synod prescribed that sacred images were permissible because they visualise what is invisible. They should be used discreetly during prayer and they should not be the object of adoration by indiscrete worshippers; the images cannot be the target of destruction, yet they could be used for teaching purposes. In addition, the Synod advised for the next pope to expel the iconodule monks from the Greek monasteries in Rome. Upon learning from the ambassador, Theodore Kritinos, about the interest in Pseudo-Dionysius in Paris, Michael sent his manuscript as a gift to Louis the Pious in 827, hoping to gain further support for his iconoclastic policies.⁴⁵ The ambassador,

Krithinos, who delivered the manuscript to the court of Louis the Pious, was *economus* of the Great Church of Constantinople. By that time, the newly elected Pope Gregory IV (827–44) had taken office, and he strongly reacted in support of the Greek iconodule communities in Rome.

In Paris, the manuscript was received with the status of a relic.⁴⁶ In order to further promote the cult of Saint Denys in France, the identities of Denys, the local, early Christian martyr, and of Dionysius the Areopagite, the disciple of Saint Paul, were merged with the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. In the abbey of Saint-Denis, a Latin version of the Life of Dionysius the Areopagite was soon produced by its learned abbot, Hilduin (775–840), although earlier, Pope Paul I (757–67) had already sent a copy of Pseudo-Dionysius' works to Saint-Denis at King Peppin's request⁴⁷; this event, however, has been questioned.⁴⁸

Secondly, Paul Magdalino further examined the situation at the court of Constantinople and found that there was an interest in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius during this period, especially in the circle of the Patriarch John the Grammarian (838–42) and the court astrologist Leo the Mathematician; both were involved in occult science, astronomy, cosmology, and geometry.⁴⁹ John the Grammarian used Pseudo-Dionysius as an authority for the prohibition of depicting the Divine. Because of his interest in astronomy, he was probably attentive also to Pseudo-Dionysius' view of the universe as based on an orderly structure.

But the appreciation of the Pseudo-Dionysian *Corpus* was also particularly strong among iconodules. One example is the case of Empress Eirene (752–803), wife of the iconoclast Emperor Leo V, an iconodule who came to Constantinople from Athens⁵⁰; she was likely also interested in Dionysius the Areopagite as the first bishop from her hometown. Regardless, Empress Eirene invited Theodore the Studite to become the abbot of the Studion monastery.⁵¹ He subsequently helped to develop this monastic institution into an important monastic scriptorium, responsible for compiling several saints' lives, including that of Dionysius the Areopagite.

Pseudo-Dionysius' works were not only appreciated but also used by iconodules. His descriptions of angels, for example, inspired artisans in the creation of art works. This is well documented in the *Life* of Patriarch Nicephorus (758–828).⁵² There are two stories in his life that attest to the importance of Pseudo-Dionysius for iconodules. One story relates to the election of Nicephorus as patriarch. Before becoming

patriarch, he was a layman at the imperial court; in order to be ordained as patriarch, he first had taken monastic vows. The *Life* of Nicephorus describes this event as following:

Then after [his] initiation as a monk [Nicephorus] had proceeded in accord with the prescriptions of the wise Dionysius, and after his consecration in holy orders had proceeded step-by-step in the sequence [determined by] holy law, his ordination to the sacred episcopal office immediately followed these [other orders].⁵³

This passage confirms that Dionysius' work on the ordination of the monks, which is a part of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, was used as a 'prescription' by the Church of Constantinople for the ritual of monastic initiation, as the *Life* of Patriarch Nicephorus cited above attests. The second story of Nicephorus' *Life* narrates the debates between him in his capacity of patriarch and the new iconoclast emperor, Leo IV. In this debate, Nicephorus explains how and why artists depict angels. He uses Dionysius' works on *Celestial Hierarchy* as an authority:

In my opinion succinctly [stated], to avoid the presumption that [angels] are men in every respect. [The artists] made the distinction clear by the addition [of wings]. [When artists] portray [angels] with wings, they are not adding wings as an irrational theory, but are alluding to the angels' progress through the air, to their dwelling place in heaven with God, to their sudden descents from [heaven] among us. And to their swift returns to heaven from us. Now Moses once described the form of the cherubim as having wings (for [cherubim] are also angels, and in the opinion of Dionysius [the Areopagite], in general they call angels the powers that are both celestial and also of the spiritual order). Therefore, [artists] not unreasonably, I think, have made [angels] resemble the pattern [of the cherubim]. And now, emperor, we must keep those [considerations] in mind, and must guard fast in our souls the fact that a painting is in turn a created thing if we paint images of angels, and that I approach [images] not as if the highest and primary essence were allotted them (may I not be so insane as to think that a created thing is God!), rather as if they were fellow slaves of our common master, who have obtained exceptional privilege to approach Him because they are wealthy of virtue.⁵⁴

This passage also provides evidence that Pseudo-Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchy* was known at that time and applied by the iconodules when dealing with the question of authority in representations of holy images

in defence against iconoclasts. Examining the *florilegium* in the Parisinus Graecus 1115 (Bibliothèque Nationale de France), a thirteenth-century manuscript, a copy of the original which goes back to c.759 and includes a compilation of excerpts from different authors, Alexander Alexakis noted that the *Corpus Dionysiacum* was quoted eleven times by the iconodules in support of holy images.⁵⁵ Thus, the above sources demonstrate that by that time the *Corpus* had gained the status of authority, especially in the dispute on holy images.

The process of re-establishing the (pseudo apostolic) author Dionysius as Saint Dionysius the Areopagite was initiated by the iconodules.⁵⁶ In the last decades of the second period of Iconoclasm, Methodius, the future patriarch of Constantinople (843–7), worked on hagiographies of early and contemporary saints prosecuted by iconoclasts. He also wrote the *Passio* of St. Dionysios based on the Greek translation of the Latin *Passio*, which was produced by Hilduin.⁵⁷ The latter, the so-called Parisian Legend, merged three people in one: the Areopagite of Athens who was the disciple of St. Paul, Pseudo-Dionysius whose corpus was known in the West, and Denys of Paris who was the early Christian martyr.⁵⁸ It has been suggested that Methodius came across the Latin *Passio* during his stay in Rome sometime during 815–21. Also, Michael the Syncellus (761–846), a Palestinian monk and *synkellos* to Patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem, went to Rome (c.813) via Constantinople, where he was arrested in 815 as an iconodule and prosecuted under the iconoclast emperor Leo V. During his career, Michael wrote treatises, *encomia* of saints, and liturgical hymns. Following Methodius, he wrote the *encomium* to Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, and delivered it on his feast, 3 October, before 833.⁵⁹ In addition, a Palestinian monk, Theodore, a disciple of Michael the Syncellus, composed the canon for the feast of Dionysius the Areopagite. Both monks obtained high ecclesiastical positions in Constantinople after Iconoclasm. Freed from prison by iconodules, Michael eventually became *synkellos* to Patriarch Methodius and then *hegumenos* of the monastery of Chora.⁶⁰ Theodore Studite recorded the activity of Methodius in assembling the saints' lives in a liturgical calendar.

Thus, the compilation of an *encomium* and the commemoration of Dionysius the Areopagite in the liturgical calendar mark the beginning of his official veneration as saint. In the ninth century, his commemoration was included in the *Typikon* of the Great Church⁶¹ and in the mid-tenth century it was included in Constantinopolitan *Synaxarion*.⁶² Later,

a shorter version was included in the *Menologion of Basil II* (976–1025) (Vat. Gr. 1613, p. 82).⁶³ Thus, during the second period of Iconoclasm, the works of Pseudo-Dionysius were appreciated by both iconoclasts and iconodules, but iconodules re-established the veneration of Dionysius as a saint, contributing to his growing veneration and popularity.

A few surviving images of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, dating to shortly after Iconoclasm, suggest that his images penetrated art of this period. The presence of Dionysius the Areopagite, the first-century bishop of Athens, among the Church Fathers in the lower register of the south tympanum of Hagia Sophia is of particular interest (Figs. 9.5 and 9.10). He is shown to the right (from the east) of Gregory of Nazianzus who is at the centre of the register.⁶⁴ His image was depicted in watercolour by both Fossati and Salzenberg during the restoration of Hagia Sophia in the middle of nineteenth century. In both cases, Dionysius is portrayed with short hair and a pointed beard. Like other Church Fathers in the tympana, he is wearing bishop's vestments and holds a book in his left hand. The major difference between Fossati's and Salzenberg's watercolours is that Salzenberg probably added the three missing letters 'ONY' of his name inscribed on the left side of the nimbus; they are absent in Fossati. Dionysius is depicted in the programme, as Mango suggests, because his *synaxis*, that is the liturgical celebration of his feast day, was performed in Hagia Sophia.⁶⁵ Mango also mentions a letter of Photius to Zacharias, the *catholicos* or chief bishop of Armenian church, in which Photius argues that the Church Fathers (whose names were depicted in the north and south tympana, including Dionysius the Areopagite) all came from Greek lands and their relics rested now in Constantinople.⁶⁶ But little was known about the Dionysius of Athens mentioned in *Acts* (17, 34) until Patriarch Methodius wrote the above mentioned *Passio* and Michael the Syncellus wrote an *encomium* of his life. The importance of Dionysius for iconophiles is attested by the fact that Dionysius' image was introduced together with his name in the scene of the Crucifixion in the mid-ninth-century Khludov Psalter, fol. 45v (Fig. 9.11). The scene illustrates the vision of the Crucifixion by Dionysius the Areopagite, as first identified by Malickij, on the basis of a letter written by Dionysius to Polycarp of Smyrna.⁶⁷ The letter informs that Dionysius and his companion, Apollophanes, were in Heliopolis, Syria, when the vision of Christ's Crucifixion occurred. The story was further developed in the *encomium* written by Michael Syncellus.⁶⁸ To the right of Crucifixion,



Fig. 9.10 Dionysius the Areopagite (Watercolor by W. Salzenberg, after Salzenberg [1854, pl. BI.XXIX])

there is a group of soldiers surrounded by a crowd of people. One person is addressing two men on the right. A man holding a bunch of scrolls is identified by the inscription DIONYCIOC, that is Dionysios. Behind is his youthful companion, Apollopheanes, pointing towards the Crucifixion. His name is not inscribed but it is recorded in the letter of Dionysius to Polycarp mentioned above. It has been suggested that this illustration to Psalm 45 is Dionysius' testimony concerning Christ, the God-Man's death on the cross, and it expresses the iconodule position on the human suffering of Christ and his death.⁶⁹

It has been further posited that the Khludov Psalter was produced for private use in the circle of Patriarch Methodius.⁷⁰ Methodius was aware of this episode of Dionysius' life since he wrote the first version himself. In any case, after Iconoclasm, the Church re-instated the cult of Dionysius the Areopagite including promulgating his image such as we see it prominently on display in the south tympanum of Hagia Sophia. This was a vital point in the creation of the veneration of Pseudo-Dionysius as a saint, which was probably largely promoted by the appropriation of his *Corpus*.

We do not know who the author of the mosaic programme of Hagia Sophia was. It was created during the reigns of the emperors Basil I and Leo VI and during the patriarchate of Photius. Photius could have learnt about Dionysius from his mentor, Patriarch Methodius, the author of a compilation of saints' lives, while Leo VI understood the importance of Dionysius from Photius, who was his tutor and advisor. Scholars, however, believe that Photius was probably sceptical about the authenticity of the *Corpus Dionysiaca* because the latter does not appear in the list of books owned by Patriarch Photius, which he compiled himself.⁷¹ Moreover, Photius quoted Dionysius only marginally in a few instances.⁷² Whatever Photius' intentions were, he favourably described the hierarchical arrangement of images in the Church of the Virgin of the Pharos in the imperial palace discussed above. In addition, the mosaic image of Dionysius the Areopagite was prominently displayed among the Church Fathers at the centre of the lower register of the south tympanum of Hagia Sophia. It is unlikely that the figure of Pseudo-Dionysius was included in the mosaic programme without Photius' approval. Furthermore, in a letter to the Armenian *catholicos*, Zacharias, Photius argue that all Church Fathers, including Pseudo-Dionysius came from Greek Lands and their relics were hosted in Constantinople.

In sum, this interest in Pseudo-Dionysius, I suggest, emerged during the second period of Iconoclasm, when both iconoclasts and iconodules appreciated his works. After Iconoclasm, when the image in mosaic of Dionysius the Areopagite was created in Hagia Sophia, his veneration as a saint and his icon were starting points for establishing his cult, which, in turn, further promoted the dissemination of his writings. As a saint, however, Dionysius the Areopagite had a rather modest place. During the second period of Iconoclasm, the works of Pseudo-Dionysius were appropriated by the intellectuals of Constantinople. This interest continued after Iconoclasm among iconodules like Methodius, who served as a patriarch for several years after the Triumph of Orthodoxy and aided in the re-establishment of the veneration of images, and among his circle. In the second half of the ninth century, when centrally planned domed churches became popular and image veneration was again considered lawful, the concept of the hierarchic order of celestial and terrestrial beings was needed in the new schema of church decoration to clarify for viewers the mystery of the Incarnation and to provide a visual reality of images displayed in a new architectural setting.

CONCLUSIONS

The hierarchical order in evidence in the mosaics of Hagia Sophia and other Byzantine churches of the second part of the ninth century manifests a new way of displaying images in ecclesiastical decorative programmes. Through a hierarchical order of images, churches provided a link between heaven and earth, thereby reflecting the universe as outlined by Dionysius. Furthermore, these church programmes show that the general concept of Dionysius' order was customised by patrons and artisans depending upon the architectural setting and the choice of images.

In Late Antiquity, Pseudo-Dionysius' writings were slowly appropriated by theologians and monastic communities, especially in the Christian East. During the first period of Iconoclasm, his writings were used to defend holy images by the theologians, such as John of Damascus. In the second period of Iconoclasm, the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius were appreciated by both iconoclasts and iconodules. Iconoclasts valued the *Corpus Dionysiacum* as a commodity and used it as a diplomatic gift to gain support for their policies from the Frankish court. Iconodules appreciated it as a spiritual and orderly

model for constructing a universe that showed a way of communication between God and mankind. Thus, by accepting the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, the Church took for granted that Dionysius the Areopagite of Athens and the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* were one and the same person. After Iconoclasm, the Church re-established the veneration of Dionysius the Areopagite as a saint as well as his formally accepted iconic image, as seen in the mosaics of Hagia Sophia. From that time on, Pseudo-Dionysius' hierarchical order of celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies was most likely appropriated by learned patrons in Constantinople, as Hagia Sophia and other Byzantine churches demonstrate.

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NOTES

1. Select works on Pseudo-Dionysius: Louth (1989, 1997, 2008b), Rorem and Lamoreaux (1998), Arthur (2008), Efthymiadis (2011, 95–142), Cunningham (2014), and Dillon (2014, 118–22).
2. Mainoldi (2016a, b, 2017, 2018).
3. Otto Demus outlines general principles of the hierarchical order in middle and late Byzantine church decoration. He, however, did not provide connection between the church decoration and the works of Pseudo Dionysius. His discussion focuses mainly on the eleventh- and twelfth-century churches, when church decoration was already established. Demus (1948). Recently, Bogdanović (2011, 109–13) has looked at Pseudo-Dionysius' legacy in middle and late Byzantine churches and their decoration and suggests a possible appropriation of Dionysian ideas in Byzantine church architecture and decoration. See also von Simson (1956, 139–41, 155), Dufrenne (1965, 185–99), Todić (1999, 87–96), and Constantinides (1992, 91–8); On the arts: Mathew (1963), Bychkov (1977), Lowden (1997), Peers (2001), Barber (2002), Perl (1998), Velmans (2009), and Woodfin (2012, 113). Recently, Carolyn Connor surveyed ninth- and tenth-century church decorative programs in Constantinople and the Byzantine provinces. She, however, does not consider the question of the origin of these programs or their relevance to the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies of Pseudo-Dionysius; see Connor (2009, 2016).
4. For bibliographical references, see note 2.

5. On the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies, see Dillon (2014).
6. Mango and Hawkins (1965).
7. Mango (1962, 48–66, figs. 57–89, and diagrams III–IV) and Mango and Hawkins (1972, 1–41, esp. 37–41).
8. Mango (1962, 76–80, figs. 100–1).
9. The bust of Christ in the dome is commonly associated with the appellation Pantocrator (‘All-sovereign’) in Byzantine churches. This epithet is used to designate God and the individual persons of the Trinity. In Byzantine art it applies especially to Christ’s kingship. It is occasionally included in the inscriptions that accompany images of Christ in the domes of Byzantine churches. See Wessel (1966a), Carr (1982), Warland (1986), Stouphe-Poulemenou (1986), and Ševčenko (1991). On the use of the Pantocrator, see Bury (1969), Capizzi (1964), Wessel (1966b), Charalampidis (1972), Podskalsky (1991), Demus (1948, 17–22), and Teteriatnikov (2015, 285–6) with full bibliography.
10. Timken Mathews (1976, 1978). For the inscription, see Mango and Hawkins (1972, 1–41).
11. Mango (1962, III–IV).
12. Mango (1962, figs. 57 and 59), Mango and Hawkins (1972, 1–41), and Teteriatnikov (1998).
13. Photius of Constantinople, *Homilies*, Mango (trans.) (1958, 184–190, esp. 187).
14. Mango (1991) and Ousterhout (1998).
15. Mango (1972, 203–4).
16. Ousterhout (1998), and Marinis (2014), 53–54.
17. For the ninth- or early tenth-century date, see Kostof (1972, 112–13, 194, pl. 29), Lafontaine-Dosogne (1963, 159–62), Thierry (1963, 73–87). See also Restle (1967, I, 70, 172, III, pl. LV, ill. 488).
18. For this dating, see Cormack (1967, 33), Wharton-Epstein (1979, 30, n. 6), and Cave (1984, 249) dates it to the first quarter or mid tenth-century. See also Jerphanion (1942, vol. I, 1, 433–6; vol. 2, 418).
19. Cormack (1980–1981) and Mavropoulou-Tsioumi (2012), 248–95.
20. Mauropoulou-Tsioni, Kountouras (1981), 488–96. Ćurčić (2010, 339–40), and Taddei (2016).
21. Mathews (1971). See also Taft (1975, 1992, 52–84).
22. On late antique church decoration of Rome and Ravenna, see Tronzo (1989, 167–93), Kessler (2002), Ihm (1992), and Marsengill (2013). See also chapter by Vladimir Ivanovici in this volume.
23. Mathews (1971) and Marinis (2014, 114–18).
24. Marinis (2014).
25. Theodoridou (1988).
26. George (1913), Peschlow (1977), and Kuniholm et al. (2015, 47–90).

27. Schmit (1927, pl. IV).
28. Cormack (1980–1981).
29. For the date ca. 740, see U. Peschlow (1977). Hagia Eirene was recently re-attributed to the reign of Empress Eirene on the bases of carbon dating of the wooden beams. Currently, this dating has been accepted by scholars. See Kuniholm et al. (2015).
30. Panayotidi (2013).
31. Lange (1986, 93–113), Mathews and Daskalakis-Mathews (1997, 294–315), Ousterhout (1998, 127; 2001, 3–20).
32. Eyice (1958), Mango and Ševčenko (1973), and Pekak (1995, 310–14).
33. Ousterhout (1998, 127). For similar discussion, see Marinis (2014, 21–33).
34. On the dome and light, see Schibille (2014) and Teteriatnikov (2017).
35. Taft (1975, 99–105) and Schultz (1986, 164–77).
36. Gero (1975). See also Louth (2015, 170–86).
37. For discussion of sources on the cross as symbol of Christ in the dome of Hagia Sophia, see Teteriatnikov (2017, 274–5).
38. Demus (1948, 11–13).
39. On their dates, cf. Alexakis (1996), Noble (2009, 57), Brubaker and Haldon (2011, 120), and Dell’Acqua (forthcoming).
40. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, III.21 (=I.11), PTS 17:128–9; Louth (trans.) (2003, 98). See also comments by Dell’Acqua (forthcoming).
41. *EH* III.iii.4:429C; 83, 13–15; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 213). See also Dillon (2014, 429 CD).
42. *EH* I.i.1:372A–B; 63, 11–64, 4; Luibheid and Rorem (trans.) (1987, 195–6). See also Dillon (2014, 372 AB).
43. Magdalino (2011, 2014).
44. On the history of the manuscript, see Porcher and Concasty (1958, 3–4, cat. no. 6), Germain (1992), Irigoien (1997), and Perria (2000).
45. By that time, the abbey church of Saint-Denis had already a copy of the CD. In the mid-eighth century, Pope Paul I sent the Greek manuscript to Pepin the Short. See Loenertz (1950).
46. Lowden (1992) and Hilsdale (2017).
47. Noble (2009, 431, note 160).
48. Luscombe (1988, 134–6, esp. n. 12).
49. Magdalino (2014).
50. *Vita Irenes*, Halkin (ed.) (1988), Barbe (1990), Hollinsworth and Cutler (1991), Garland (1999), Herrin (2001), and James (2009, 45, 46). See also Treadgold (1982).
51. Treadgold (1997, 552) and Louth (2008a, 52).
52. Fisher (1998, 25–142).

53. Fisher (1998, 63).
54. Fisher (1998, 99–100).
55. Alexakis (1996, 233).
56. The cult of Dionysius Areopagite as a saint was introduced first by the Chalcedonians in the sixth century in Constantinople. See Engberding (1954).
57. Efthymiadis (2011, 103).
58. Krausmüller (2009).
59. Efthymiadis (2011, 104) and Podolak (2015, 180).
60. Browning and Kazhdan (1991) with bibliography; See also Šmit (1906), Théry (1923), Efthymiadis (2011, 104), and Podolak (2015, 192).
61. *The Typicon of the Great Church*, Mateos (ed.), I, 58–9.
62. Delchaye (1902).
63. Efthymiadis (2011, 129).
64. Mango (1962, 51) and Mango and Hawkins (1972, 37–8).
65. Ibid.
66. Mango and Hawkins (1972, 37–8).
67. Malickij (1932, 235–43), Scepkina (1977, fol. 45v), Walter (1990), Corrigan (1992, 83–5), and Andersen (1997).
68. Michael Syncellus, *Encomium beati Dionysii Areopagitae*, PG 4:628.
69. Corrigan (1992, 85).
70. Corrigan (1992, 85) and Andersen (1997, 97–8).
71. For the publication of the *Bibliotheca*, see Photius, *The Bibliotheca*, Wilson (trans.) (1994).
72. Photius, *The Bibliotheca*, Wilson (trans.) (1994, 27, n. 2); Photius, for example, mentions that Presbyter Theodore was present in the Lateran Council in 649, where the works of Dionysus were authenticated and received official recognition. See PG 3:16.

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GLOSSARY

Apophatic referring to the impossibility of providing an appropriate definition for the true nature of God

Eikonic (iconic) pertaining to images and the making of things through imitative images, concerning arts, poetry and liturgy. *Eikonic* thought is a part of Byzantine theology, which defines theological concepts through their depiction in images. The procession from intelligible archetypes to the material beings can be ‘iconic’ when the divine model remains in the material things (as it happens with holy icons). Consequently, the goal of the iconic imitator is the energetic correspondence between prototypes and objects

Energetic referring to divine energies or operations

Essence *ousia*, substance, the specific nature of every being

Gnoseological referring to the theory of knowledge

Iconological referring to the theory of sacred images

Hypostatic referring to individuals (hypostases)

Hypostases the individuals in which the substance exists

Keiragogía (Anagogical guidance) the idea that the human mind needs visible symbols to approach understanding of the divine reality. In this sense, symbols are defined by Pseudo-Dionysius as important/crucial components in the guidance toward anagogy (spiritual elevation)

Likeness (ὁμοίωσις, ὁμοιότης) the similitude between an image and its prototype. It is associated to the Biblical anthropogenesis, which is at the basis of the Byzantine theory of image

Meontological referring to non-being

Mimetic according to Pseudo-Dionysius, a mimetic image imitates reality. Liturgical rites imitate the historical acts of Jesus, and in this sense, they are said to be 'mimetic'. By contrast, symbols refer indirectly to the divine only indirectly, since their shapes can only show only in inappropriate ways something of their divine nature. The quality of being mimetic may coincide with iconic, but it has deeper and more ancient philosophical and artistic implications. Whether copying or representing, generally in Greek philosophy, mimesis is imitation which generates particular (inferior) things derived by universal forms. Arts and poetry are mimetic because they copy things of nature (imitations of imitations, for Plato). Mimesis develops in a crucial, favourable process for Christian authors: Christ is the image of the Father and the sacraments are images of Christ, which provide man with a mimetic instrument to become divinised

Morphogenetic concerning the divine creation of the forms of all beings

Ontological referring to the being of things

Synergy the cooperation between God and humans

Sophiology the reflection of the 'existence' of all things in divine Wisdom, whether before their creation or during their coming into being

Theophanic referring to divine manifestation (divine appearances)

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